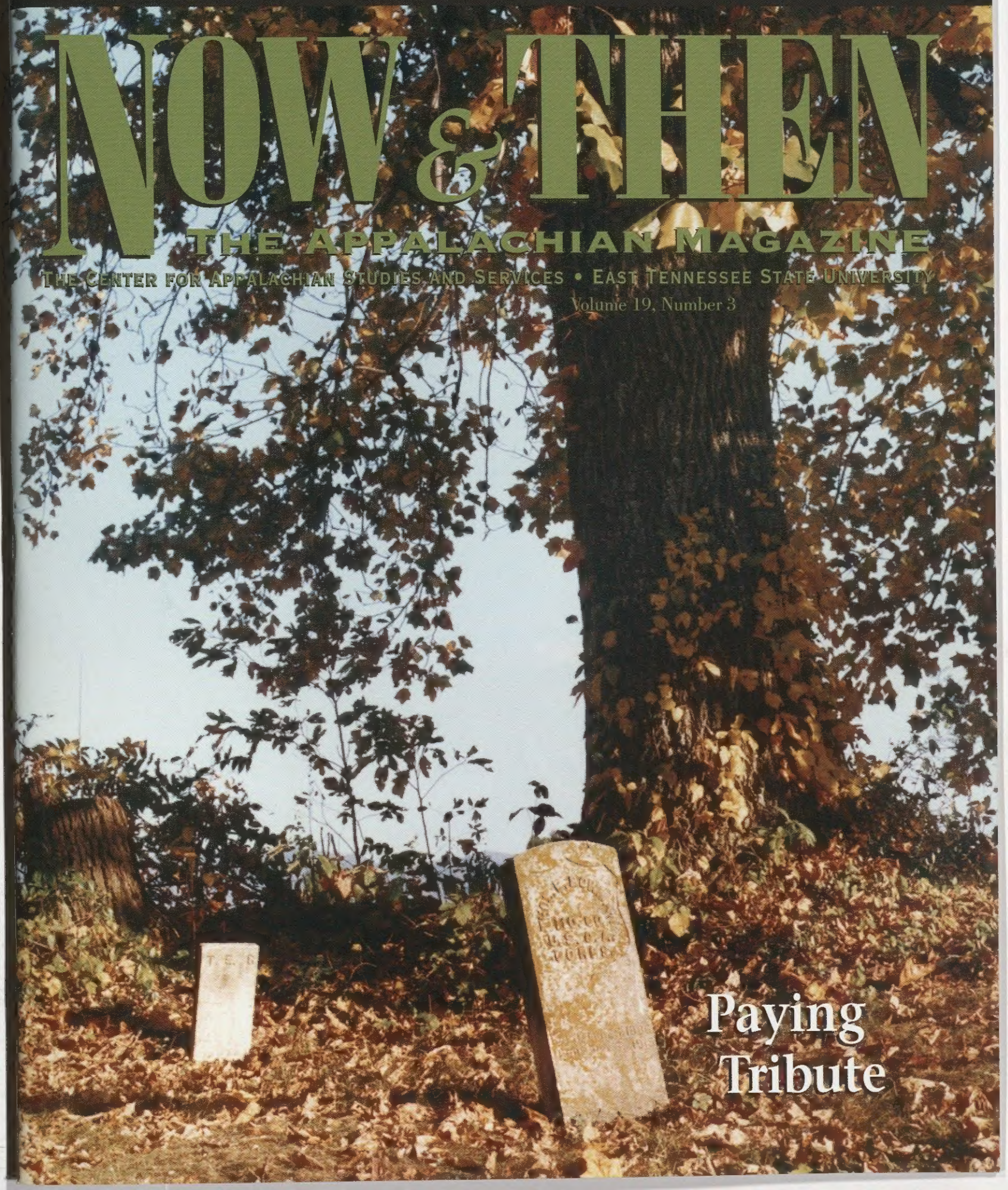
Harriette Arnow • Lynchburg, Virginia's Free Blacks • James Still • A One-Armed Outfielder

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

THE CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
Volume 19, Number 3



Paying Tribute

Looking for Leonids

Despite media reports—brilliant meteor showers, once in a lifetime—I expect nothing.
Set my alarm as if it is a typical work day,
step into the backyard carrying coffee and a quilt, warm coat worn over pajamas.
I can always go back to bed.
My dog thinks otherwise, dances around me in pow-wow circles.
outsidewearegoingoutsideitisdarkandwearegoingoutside
She is ready for adventures of pre-dawn scent trails,
while I step lightly where her paws have landed, trusting
she will lead me past piles of excrement, considering how and why it is, after all,
humans who are always stepping in shit.

We stop at the lawn chair, settle down, both of us looking up,
her whiskers twitching with proof of what I cannot even see.
Beneath me the chair creaks,
deteriorating sighs of summer easing me closer to earth,
distant train whistle whispering other travels,
while in the sky nothing happens.

Nothing happens until the first faint streak,
joined by others, more and less brilliant, brightest at the periphery.
Wish after wish, the way a child wishes without knowing they might never come true.
World peace.
Happily-ever-after.
A hippopotamus.
A joyful noise.

That is when you appear.
To my far right, emerging from pine and thick pokeweed,
wearing blue, faded plaid flannel and denim.
I am afraid to turn my head, afraid I might lose you again.
You are standing, just standing several feet away,
reminding me of all those years ago, the psychiatrist who told me
I would not be better until I stopped wishing you were alive.

When I break the spell, wish you alive, you fade,
white lines of your shirt streaking comet bright.
There is no time to tell you *here is my foolish house …*
here is my wild yard … here is my lovesick dog.
You know everything.
Knew where to find me, how undying love burns my tongue like salt,
how my face mirrors the sky's shining trails,
pale fingers radiating through my dog's thick fur.

Someday ancients will point toward earth and sky, bound to telling the story:
It was a morning filled with meteors.
Here is where the chair gave way.
Rock piles formed from dog droppings.
When the moon curves the crescent of her dog's tail,
the freckled arc at the corner of her right eye, the one that saw him,
both dog and woman have been heard howling.
This is what happens when you live with stars in your eyes.

—Donna Doyle

Donna Doyle is a native of "south of the river" Knoxville, Tenn. This poem is dedicated to her father, Donald Philip Doyle, who was born on July 1, 1934, and died on July 22, 1982. Her poem, "Sunbathing with Elvis," received an honorable mention in Now & Then's *2002 Appalachian Poetry Competition.*

Cover photograph of the N.G. Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church graveyard, Carter County, Tenn., by Alice Anthony. Layout by Hillhouse Graphic Design, Kingsport, Tenn.

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—**Tami R.S. Penley**

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Ghosts

By the time I sit down to write this column, we are in the final stages of magazine production. As I thumb through the page proofs, I often find myself comparing the issue I pictured at the beginning of the process, however dimly, with the one I now hold in my hands.

As nearly as I can remember, in the case of Paying Tribute, I imagined thoughtful but somewhat dispassionate assessments of the contributions made by people — the famous, not-so-famous, and the unknown — to the Appalachian region during the course of their lives. What I never quite pictured was how haunted the writers would be by their subjects.

In "Looking for Leonids," poet Donna Doyle describes catching the ghost of her father out of the corner of her eye while sitting in her backyard scanning the cold, dark sky for shooting stars. Jim Clark writes that after his introduction to Georgia poet Byron Herbert Reece, "the lines of Reece's poetry haunted me." Lola, the main character in Tami Penley's short story "Paying Tribute" feels the presence of family members who have shaped her for good or ill.

These are pieces about people who are actually family in many instances — or people who feel much like family even when they aren't. They are deeply felt memorials to passionate people. And these stories are often permeated by a sense of urgency. As Lola's mother says, "As long as we remember, they aren't really dead, are they? They live through us, through the stories they tell." By telling these Appalachians' stories, the writers seem to hope they can keep alive the spirits of those who have died just a little while longer so they can continue to inspire others.

— Jane Harris Woodside, editor

Letters to the Editor

For me, "Ray Hicks and the Doctors" (Summer 2002) is a poignant article. His lengthy emergency room wait is all too typical of the care received by the elderly in today's high-tech hospital where "emergency" rooms seem to rent by the hour. I was cheered by Mr. Hicks' humor and indomitable spirit and so glad he persevered through treatment.

Now that I've said my piece, I'm going to boil me some eggs for John O'Brien's Eggs Claude Monet recipe while I read the Jeff Mann interview and his poem.

Another great issue.

Phyllis Wilson Moore
Clarksburg, W.Va.

Lee Smith's essay "Raised to Leave" in the spring 2002 issue of *Now & Then* is one of the finest pieces of writing I've ever seen. She combined an overview of what it was like to grow up in Grundy, Va., with a look at Dr. Ralph Stanley's rise to national prominence in less than four pages.

While the positives far outweigh the negatives for those of us who choose to live in Appalachia, it is unfortunate that we still have those who would refer to Lee's mother as a "foreigner" at her funeral more than 50 years after she became a part of the community. I have been in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina for a combined total of 42 years and still run into this kind of thinking occasionally.

I can relate to Lee's statement that this hillbilly music didn't have anything to do with "culture" because my parents and my grandmother were quite concerned about my love for Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, and the Stanley Brothers. At school in Pennsylvania, I was laughed at because I made no apologies for the hillbilly music I loved. I'm having the last laugh these days with Dr. Ralph's success and the recognition bluegrass music is getting in the national media.

I'm proud to say that I used to listen to the Stanley Brothers on WCYB Radio's *Farm and Fun Time.* I heard them say many times they had a show date in Grundy, never knowing little Lee Smith was waiting for them to come to the drive-in. I've followed their careers through some good times and bad, Carter's death, and Dr. Ralph's recent stardom. I had some of their old 78-rpm records and lots of 45-rpm and LP albums. Now I have most of their work on CDs. It is a treat to follow their music, from the archaic sound of their Rich'R'Tone records cut at WOPI in Bristol to their evolution into a bluegrass band at WCYB and the changes Dr. Ralph made as a single act.

When I went to see *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* I was aware I would hear Dr. Ralph sing "Oh, Death" and that "Man of Constant Sorrow" was in the movie. What a joy to hear the Stanley Brothers sing "Angel Band" as the credits rolled! I got misty-eyed as the thought occurred to me that it was an almost 100 percent probability that I was the only one in the theater who had heard Carter and Ralph Stanley sing that song on WCBY Radio in the 1950s.

The very well-written essay was strengthened by the beautiful picture of the author. I have never seen a picture of a child whose facial features look so similar to the way she looks as an adult a half century later.

Bruce Steinbicker
Asheville, N.C.

Letters to the editor should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to: Editor, Now & Then, *ETSU, Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614 or e-mail woodsidj@mail.etsu.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

Correction

Dan Johnson, chair of East Tennessee State University's biological sciences department, reported an error he found in our summer issue, First Person Appalachia. In my interview with Judy Loest, third-prize winner in the 2002 Appalachian Poetry Competition, I referred to Bays Mountain Park in Kingsport, Tenn., as a state park. It is in fact a nature preserve owned and operated by the city of Kingsport. My apologies for the error, and my thanks to Dan Johnson for setting me straight.

— JHW

Paying Tribute

by Tami R.S. Penley

Lola stubbed her toe against a leaning marble angel with "Rest in Peace" etched on its sides and dropped her Styrofoam plate full of Aunt Dorothy's potato salad all down her new high-tech, sweat-wicking hiking shorts. Damn. That's what she got for belonging to a family that, for God's sake, held its reunion in the family cemetery. Of all places. Everybody in her mother's generation thought this made perfect sense. It did not make sense to Lola and to most of the cousins her age. Why didn't they just rent the Ruritan cabin and meet like normal people?

"Look, what a mess." Her Aunt Fern appeared at Lola's elbow and ignored the mustardy stain spreading down her niece's new shorts and instead leaned down to clean off the headstone with impatient snaps of a wad of napkins. Lola grabbed a napkin from the bunch and started wiping herself off. Little bits of egg stuck to the tops of her feet.

"Tell me again, Aunt Fern, why do we have to get together in an abandoned cemetery on top of a mountain at the end of a mile-and-a-half of cow path to see each other?"

Her aunt looked up at her, then continued wiping around the faded letters inscribed on the food-desecrated headstone. "Because this is where we came from." She walked off, wrapping the napkins and Lola's crumpled plate into a little ball.

Well, that cleared everything right up. *We came from a graveyard.* Yep. Made perfect sense to Lola.

She skirted around the soft area in front of the grave. Those were the worst places. The indentions in the earth in front of the markers. Just the size and shape not of a coffin but of a body. A body no longer there to hold back the damp earth under the drooping old hemlock trees. She did not want to think about what time and dirt and insects and rain and freezes and thaws had done to the bodies, to the flesh, to the bones. … Her appetite disappeared, just like it did every year the family gathered here. Gone. No food today for her. Damn, and she loved Aunt Dorothy's potato salad.

Damn. That's what she got for belonging to a family that, for God's sake, held its reunion in the family cemetery. Of all places. Everybody in her mother's generation thought this made perfect sense. It did not make sense to Lola.

Her hand went up to rub the little ragged black stain just below her left eye. Being here at the annual Stallard reunion was never the best day in her life, but this time, it did seem worse. The stones around her were standing testaments to the fact that, well, just face it, people die. And Lola was pretty sure she was a people. Not a vegetable. Not a mineral. Just a people. Big and kind of fleshy, pale, a little soft around the middle, sporting a nasty little wisp of cells right on her cheek, triggered to go mad and eat off her face. Travel down the pathways of her lymph system carrying the mutated little sons of bitches to go wreak

havoc in some other vital place, some place she might really need to stay whole and above ground awhile longer.

Why in the hell do we have to meet in a cemetery? Most of us don't even remember any of the people buried here.

She looked around the little knots of relatives gathered in the clearing. Her great-uncle James stood off to one side with her two second cousins Charlie and Curtis. James had been born in the house down the ridge that was now just timbers and a rock foundation. He was the only one left of his three brothers and two sisters. Her own grandfather, Walter Stallard, had been dead nine years. But all of their progeny were represented here.

The stones around her were standing testaments to the fact that, well, just face it, people die. And Lola was pretty sure she was a people. Not a vegetable. Not a mineral. Just a people.

That generation's children, her mother's generation, were now beginning to get old, starting to die. Her Aunt Virginia, her mother's sister, had died last year of a cancer that ate through her lungs and into her brain. Aunt Virginia's seven children were all here today, even though their mother was buried in a big town cemetery in the next county. They were here because this day had been their mother's favorite time to get together with her cousins from childhood. They were here even though, like her, they didn't know many of the other more distant cousins sprung from the original Stallard clan.

The children were running like wraiths through the trees, calling to one another on land laid claim to by ancestors who no longer walked the earth, people who would be afraid of Cousin Darrell Wayne's new red-and-black Kodiak four-wheeler and Curtis' cell phone — which kept ringing and making him run off behind a tree to find some quiet. Lola edged around a tiny marble marker. So many children's graves, one at the back of the cemetery with three names on it (Hannah, Garnet, and Charles)— triplets dead at birth to a girl not yet sixteen. Lola didn't know the history of the family, the genealogy. Did the mother have other children? Or was her genetic legacy the three tiny dead babies all stacked together in one fresh-sawed pine coffin?

There was Tricia, an older cousin she did remember, carrying a new grandchild rolling in her arms, trying to find a way out before a dreaded diaper change over by the parked trucks. Hadn't she had breast cancer a couple of years ago?

Damn, that word was coming up a lot these days. Lola scanned the group from her spot at the edge of the graveyard. How many? She went through the list of the ones she knew. Tricia: breast cancer, surviving. Aunt Virginia: lung cancer, dead one year. Great-Aunt Louise: liver cancer, dead three years. Two distant cousins: one with bone cancer, dead? Not sure about the other one: maybe uterine cancer. Who else? Nobody came to mind.

Then she remembered. Her great-grandfather Ezra. That man who had built the house down the ridge. The man she could barely remember. The man with no face.

Even now, he sometimes stalked through her dreams. She was only four when he died, but she could call up his face, that horrible face. The sunken red scars where a cheek should have been, the disfigured mouth, the drooping right eye and lips. A face usually hidden behind a red bandana out in public, but exposed around family. To her, he was not really a person, not really her great-grandfather, but a bogeyman, a ghoul to scare young children. What had done that to his face? Had she ever asked her mother? She needed to talk to her mother.

Lola sidestepped the next headstone and made her way over to where her mother sat in a folding chair at the edge of the second row of graves. She was holding court with three of the younger cousins from West Virginia. On her lap, she held the big shoe box full of family pictures she had been gathering up for years.

The cousins, relieved to be rescued, looked up at Lola and scattered. Lola eased down beside her mother's lawn chair and asked, "Tell me again, why do we meet here?"

Joyce Louise Stallard Taylor took a deep, loud breath and looked hard at her daughter. "This is how we pay tribute, remember them that has gone before. See over there?" She pointed to a small, smooth gray stone. "That is where that poor little baby is buried." Then silence. Her mother pooched out her lips and made a *tsk-tsking* little noise. But no more words, no explanation.

"OK, I give up, Mom. What 'poor little baby'?"

"I know I have told you this story, but you never listen, you never would listen. I bet you can't even name how you are kin to half the people buried here. …"

"I can't even name how I am kin to half the people eating potato salad and deviled eggs on *top* of the people buried here."

Joyce gave Lola a look and pooched up her lips some more, then leaned in close. "That baby is buried here, but it ain't listed in the family Bible." She gave Lola another look and nodded her head like she had just explained something secret and kind of dirty.

Then she remembered. Her great-grandfather Ezra. The man she could barely remember. The man with no face.

"So?" Lola knew better than to ask the question, but she couldn't help herself. Giving her mother an opening could prove dangerous, though.

"You know what I mean. That baby was a bastard."

Lola felt the words crawl against her skin and cut into her. Those two words didn't belong together. *Baby. Bastard.* To her, the word *bastard* was used to apply to any man who is crude, mean in some basic way. She had to take a breath to realize her mother was using the older, original meaning of the word: baby

born out of wedlock. The notion that such a thing is a secret, a shame, took her a minute to digest.

Her mother leaned in to tell her more, and Lola wasn't sure she wanted to know more. Maybe some secrets needed to be kept under six feet of red Virginia clay.

"Mom," she interrupted the story that was building, "I want to know what happened to Great-Grandfather Ezra's face."

Joyce stopped shuffling through the photographs. She looked away from Lola, focusing on two little boy cousins with identical haircuts toddling through the leaning gate at the edge of the clearing.

"He had cancer, skin cancer." She paused and again began rummaging through the old pictures. She talked without looking at her daughter. "In those days, people around here didn't go to doctors much. He had a spot on his cheek, and it just kept getting bigger, you know, like a big liver spot? By the time my daddy and his brothers and sisters wrangled him in to see a doctor, it had spread all over his face. They did surgery and left him the way you remember him. But that ain't what killed him. No. He died of cancer," again her speech seemed to slow and start up again, "but it was cancer in his bones. He lived for almost a year after they did the surgery on his face. That ain't what killed him."

Drue Dixon

Lola wanted to tell her mother, yes, yes, it is what killed him. Probably melanoma gone to seed in his cells, spreading like the stain on his face out to blood and lymph. Cutting away his face hadn't done anything but scar the man for his last few months on earth.

"Did I know him before he lost his face to the surgery?" Lola asked.

Her mother quit shuffling the pictures and looked her daughter in the eyes. "Of course you knew him. What a question. You were his favorite. We lived not three miles from him the whole time you was growing up until, well, until he died, but you was almost five when he died. You have to remember him, Lola. He always wore this poor old blue coat, and he never tied his shoes. Said they kept his feet from breathing. And smoke, Lord, could that man smoke. Rolled his own cigarettes. He was the first person to hold you when I brought you home from the hospital. He came over to eat with us almost every Sunday and would bring you a nickel. You know all this. Right?"

"No, Mom, you know all that. I don't remember anything but a pale little spindly man with a red bandana around his face most of the time. The time I remember best, I think we were cutting up apples to make apple butter. He took off the bandana, and I saw his face. That's all I remember. That face not really being there. The scars…"

Her mother looked back to the box in her lap. She shuffled through the pictures and chose one. She stood up and took her daughter's hand, pulling her through the rows of graves, skirting around the soft places in front of the headstones, weaving around children and people in lawn chairs, heading with sure steps to the back of the cemetery, back to the original stones. They stopped in front of a leaning marble monument, with the name "Ezra Jedediah Stallard" barely etched in its moss-colored face.

"There. That is him. And here," she handed Lola a small black-and-white photograph in a velvet sleeve. "Here he is before the sickness. The way I guess I had always thought you remembered him. He had the palest eyes I ever saw, blue, but such a pale, sweet blue. Yours are almost the same, just not quite as light. He was the first person to hold you when I brought you home from the hospital. Did you know that? He rode his old roan horse over three, four times a week when you was little to sit and hold you. Lord, how many times did I catch him with you up in the saddle with him, even when you was tiny?

"I used to keep all the nickels he gave you. Every time he came to see us, he would bring you a nickel. He called them your inheritance. But when you were in the third grade, you got into the stash and spent them, every one, on clothes for your

new Barbie. I don't think there is a one of those nickels of his still around anywhere. Here, this is him."

Maybe it would have been different if Lola hadn't been standing on his grave when her mother handed her the picture of her great-grandfather. That surely made it worse. Knowing that the man in the image was not only gone beyond her ken, beyond any hope of her finding him, but what was left of him on this earth — bones over 30 years in the ground — lay just beneath her brand-new Merrell walking sandals. That made the loss worse.

But it started with the picture. Maybe if Lola could remember him better, had been able to call up the sound of his voice, the feel of his old arms around her shoulders, the smell of his hand-rolled cigarettes, she would have had a different response to the picture of him as a young man, before the sickness, before he died of the same disease that now sat like a dark little demon on her cheek.

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But it didn't work that way.

Instead, she took the old black-and-white photograph from her mother's hands and felt the chambers of her heart seize up in a spasm of what felt like longing, longing for something gone away, something lost to her that felt precious and sorely missed. In the picture, he seemed eternal, real enough to reach for, to touch. Lola didn't remember him this way. She couldn't remember him without the scars. Why couldn't she remember him riding on his roan horse to visit her when she was a child and bringing her a new, shiny nickel?

Or did she remember? Sometimes she thought that her memories had been constructed from the stories her mother and grandmother had told her about the visits from her great-grandfather. What she did seem to remember was the smell of tobacco and that sweet mustiness that rises off the bodies of old, clean-sweated men. She didn't remember the face in the picture looking back at her, but parts of it were as familiar as the face looking back at her in the mirror every morning. The same high forehead and heart-shaped chin. The same pale eyes and light hair. That much she could tell, even in black and white.

Lola had never wanted to look like her mother's people. Why couldn't she have taken after her dad's side of the family? That was where the interesting blood flowed. Melungeon and French. Why did she have to resemble the intense, pale-eyed man in the photograph in her hands? What kind of legacy did having his Scotch-Irish genes give her? Weak skin cells? Cells with no gumption to stand up to the noonday sun?

"I don't remember," she whispered. Usually at these reunions, she felt as removed from the people beneath her feet as she would from a cinnabar-covered skeleton from a tomb in Peru. No connection. No spark of feeling or kinship. Just bones.

But now, now, she looks down at the marker that bears the name *Ezra Jedediah Stallard* — now she has a different face to put with that name, cheekbones and a strong chin, eyes that have not yet seen too much of death in the mirror. She knows now that this man rides along in her genes, his life coding parts of her body, telling it to be this way, not that way. Is he there in the soft skin on the underside of her arm? Is it his feet that provide the pattern for her crooked third toe? Is he responsible for the cancer that even now wants to run from her face into the marrow of her bones, the lymph fluid that should run clean and true but now might be providing a path for death to find a way into her?

Lola felt her mother's hand petting her shoulder. Her voice seemed to come to Lola from a long distance. "Shh, what you so pale for? It's OK if you don't remember him. It's OK. Don't get so upset." She brushed the hair back from Lola's face. "I shouldn't have made you come this year. I'm sorry, but I just don't want to be the last one who remembers. I want you to remember, too, and tell your kids, who will come here and tell their kids. When we stop talking about them that's gone before, nobody else will remember. Who will remember us when we go, who will remember? If I don't tell you that your great-grandmother had red hair just like your sister's, just like your cousin Sam's, the links will be broken. And the next generation, these little ones running around here in their diaper tails, who will tell them who they came from?"

Lola held the photograph and stared at her great-grandfather's headstone. "What if I'm not here, Mom? What if there is no other generation for me? What if I don't live long enough to have children to come here and hear the old stories. Look at his eyes." She held up the photograph of her great-grandfather. "He isn't thinking about death here. He still thinks he will live forever. He isn't imagining the red clay mud falling around him, he isn't looking out his farmhouse window up to the cemetery on the ridge and imagining what all the years he will have to spend up here under the ground will be like. But you know what? I am imagining it. I see it in my mind. I can't not think about it. I see death coming. Sometimes I smell it."

"We all do, Daughter. You think you are any different? You think that mean little spot of cancer on your face gives you some special permission to worry about death? It don't." Joyce moved closer to Lola, put a hand to her face, and gently stroked the tiny melanoma growing there.

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Wait until you have buried all them that has gone before you. All your aunts and uncles. Me. Wait until you watch them close the casket lid on my face for the last time. Then you will wish you had some part of me back. You will want something to make me seem real to your

kids and your grandbabies. You will mourn that they never knew me. You will strain to call up the sound of my voice, the way my hand felt against your cheek just now. You will grieve again each time you have a hard time calling my face up from memory. I hope you remember to talk about me, to keep me alive by telling about me, telling about the time I threw your sunglasses out the Jeep window when we were coming home from antiquing over in Blountville because you said you wished they would break so you could get some new ones."

Her mother's voice kept up its low, rhythmic cadence. Lola stared at her. First she felt the words like little bird-point arrows tearing through her skin, wounding her. The words penetrated, ripping through into some vital part of herself that felt like a layer of fat stored up against a coming winter.

On her mother's voice went, "... and don't you think I feel the same way? I want you to remember your grandmother trying to teach you to crochet as she lay working so hard to get her breath around the emphysema that was killing her. And him, especially him," she pointed to the black-and-white picture still clutched in Lola's hand. "You so remind me of him. Your eyes, your chin, the way you hold your mouth when you are mad. Sometimes I feel like I can see him there in your eyes, looking out at me from some other place. And I want you to know, to remember him and how he loved you. As long as we remember, they aren't really dead, are they? They live through us, through the stories we tell."

Lola turned from her mother. She knew that the dead leave more than stories. Her hand lifted to touch her cheek. Surgery in three days. Surgery to remove the legacy left to her by this man. Tests to determine if the cancer has spread to her lymph, to her liver, to parts of her more vital, more necessary than mere skin. She wanted to reach down through the red clay, past the remains of the rotted, dry pine coffin, and reach through what is left of the parched, white bones, and pull Ezra Jedediah Stallard back into the light, wearing his tattered blue coat and his unlaced brogan shoes. Make him face what he has made here. Reach through the gates barring heaven and ask of him, "Was this your fault?"

Instead, she felt herself break apart. No longer Lola, but just parts—her Dad's high-arched feet, her mother's lips, her grandmother's short nose, her great-grandfather's light eyes, some distant Celtic ancestor's strong calves. Just parts. No longer herself but a collection of others, all the others who had gone before. And loss, she felt a loss, the loss of not having known so many of those who rode along in her body, the loss of not knowing the stories of the people looking out into the world through her eyes.

Her mother put her arms around Lola. "Come on, let's walk down to the old house seat. Get some air. The cousins are all taking something from the old house before it just completely goes back to the earth, something to remember the place before it gets covered up by kudzu and honeysuckle."

Lola turned from the graveyard and followed her mother down the path through the hemlock trees to the second-growth timber beyond and on down toward the once-cleared yard of the farmhouse. She will take some part of the old place with her today. Take a worn red brick from the crumbling fireplace. Take a cutting from the overgrown lilac bush in the yard. Take a rusty, bent horseshoe from the leaning barn with no roof. Hear the old roan horse coming around the bend carrying a pale-eyed man with a red bandana tied around his neck, with a shiny new nickel held out in his hands like some offering of peace or restitution. N&T

Tami Penley has been a prizewinner in past Now & Then *fiction competitions. Having recently become an empty-nester, she reports that her writing now demands she pay more attention to it. She finds herself dreaming whole narratives on the drive to her job as English department chair at Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap, Va., and then spending her afternoons hunched over the keyboard.*

Long Ago and Far Away

I had a Great Uncle who gave
me a nickel once, near as I can
figure for being my mother's son.

Harry Dishong, his cemetery name,
an old-school coalminer with a soft
spot in his heart for my mother,
Lucie, his favorite niece, second
daughter of his sister Kate.

The nickel changed hands
out in the wide open during the
Golden Wedding Anniversary
celebration of Uncle Harry's
sister Kate and Jake Hoodlet,
my maternal grandparents.

I was standing beside Grandpa's
ash pile bordered by Grandma's
hot-hooved horseradish plants,
my feet slightly uphill from the
squishy litter of cattail flowers
nobody but me seemed to bother
about and me only for polliwogs
in season, when Uncle Harry came
by, not much taller'n me the way
he stooped from mining habits.

He squeezed that shiny buffalo nickel
from his hand into mine like some
kind of magic trick. But the more
years I've had to think of that day
down there at Grandpa's place in
Coal Township, the more I've come
to believe Uncle Harry paid me that
nickel for admission to my memory.

—Glenn McKee

Glenn McKee, with roots in Southeastern Ohio's coal mining region, has been appearing in Now & Then *since 1988. His poem "Memory's Menu" placed second in* Now & Then's *1998 Appalachian Poetry Competition. That poem appears in his collection,* Memory's Menu.

The Hand That Wrote *The Dollmaker*

A Tribute to Harriette Arnow

by Silas House

An intense, passionate writer from Kentucky still inspires her successors to portray Appalachia honestly, warts and all.

Let us now praise a not-famous-enough woman.

Although most readers of Appalachian literature consider Harriette Arnow to be one of the matriarchs of 20th-century literature, her name is not spoken in the same sentences with writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Porter, or Eudora Welty.

It should be.

At one time, it seemed as if this would indeed be the case. Most people don't realize that Arnow's *The Dollmaker* not only spent 31 weeks as a national best-seller but also took second place to no less than William Faulkner when his *A Fable* won the National Book Award in 1954. Earlier, in 1949, Arnow's second book, *Hunter's Horn,* beat out George Orwell's now revered *1984* for the *Saturday Review's* Best Novel Award. In 1971, novelist Joyce Carol Oates cited *The Dollmaker* as "our most unpretentious American masterpiece." The same year, Tillie Olsen, best known for her classic short story collection *Tell Me a Riddle,* identified Arnow as a writer whose "books of great worth suffer the death of being unknown."

No matter, fame. Arnow was not concerned with it herself and would surely scoff at the thought of this article wasting time dwelling upon such matters. Instead, the focus ought to be on the woman who wanted nothing more than to be a writer.

Life of a Writer

Harriette Louise Simpson was born in Wayne County, Ky., on July 7, 1908. Her family had been in the region for more than five generations, and she later expressed a debt to them for her storytelling skills. She wrote her first short story at the age of nine, while in the fourth grade, and once said that she "never got over it."

Both her parents, Mollie Jane and Elias Thomas Simpson, were teachers, and an aunt was the school superintendent, so the family put a great store by education, which led the young Harriette Simpson to attend the Berea Foundation School (later Berea College) and the University of Louisville. Instead of studying literature, she majored in science — earning a teaching certificate from Berea and a bachelor of science from the University of Louisville — perhaps in part to satisfy her family. "Mother insisted that we girls be teachers," she once told Kentucky journalist Al Smith in a television interview.

After a brief stint as a teacher, Arnow decided that she was going to follow her lifelong dream of being a writer. In 1934, she moved to Cincinnati, where she felt she could more fully devote herself to her chosen profession. There she worked odd jobs — as a waitress, library clerk, assistant for the Federal Writer's Project — to make ends meet. "I would save until I had enough to quit, live on that awhile as I wrote, then run out of money and go get another job," she said.

She wrote her first short story at the age of nine and once said that she "never got over it."

It did not take long before her talent was noticed. Her second story, "The Washerwoman's Day," appeared in *The Southern Review,* edited by Robert Penn Warren. She felt most validated by the

additional thrill of being paid $25 for her story. Other stories followed in such magazines as *Kosmos* and *The Atlantic.* Arnow once submitted a story to *Esquire* using her brother-in-law's photo and only her initials — H.L. Simpson — because she noticed that men were writing most of the magazine's pieces. "It was wrong of me to do that," she later said, with a barely detectable grin.

Only two years after moving north, she published her first novel, *Mountain Path,* in 1936. The novel garnered strong reviews from critics but was not a commercial success. These reviewers set the tone for much of her literary career. While they thought the book was brilliant, they also made note of its regionalism.

In 1939 she married journalist Harold Arnow, and after an attempt at making a living as writers and farmers in the Cumberland foothills of Kentucky, they moved to Detroit, a city that would serve as the setting for *The Dollmaker.* In Detroit, she wrote *Hunter's Horn* — published in 1949, 13 years after her first novel. The book quickly became a bestseller and won the respect of critics all across the nation. In 1951, the Arnows moved to Ann Arbor, Mich., where Harriette wrote most of her masterpiece, *The Dollmaker,* published in 1954 to wide critical acclaim.

Joyce Hancock. Photo originally appeared in Appalachian Journal, Spring 1981. Used by permission.

Harriette Arnow, shown here in 1979, taught at the Hindman Settlement School's Appalachian Writers Workshop for eight years.

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After the success of *The Dollmaker,* Arnow turned her keen eye to nonfiction, producing such books as *Seedtime on the Cumberland* in 1960 and *Flowering of the Cumberland* in 1963, both studies of her native Cumberland River region. These two books are often said to provide the definitive history of the European settlement of the area as well as a framework for Appalachian history. A 1970 novel entitled *The Weedkiller's Daughter* marked her long-awaited return to fiction. This was followed by her last major work, a 1974 historical novel called *The Kentucky Trace.* In 1977, she published *Old Burnside,* a memoir that is beloved by her readers, though Arnow considered it her worst book.

Arnow received a resurgence of interest in 1984 after the widely watched television broadcast of a movie based upon her most famous book. Jane Fonda starred in the three-hour version of *The Dollmaker* and won an Emmy for her portrayal of its heroine, Gertie Nevels.

In her lifetime, Arnow became known as a writer whose themes were ahead of her time. She often wrote about strong women and always had a social and cultural message to share with her readers. More than anything else, Arnow showed the world the gradual opening up of Appalachia as the region became more modernized and less isolated. At the core of all Arnow's work is an acute attention to the human spirit. She wrote about human beings and the interactions between them, and managed to capture all of that in a way that few writers have.

Only two years after the new attention brought on by Fonda's television movie, Harriette Arnow died in 1986 from heart disease, less than a year after her husband's death. "Characteristically, she was on the family farm," says George Brosi, current editor of *Appalachian Heritage* and a friend of Arnow's. "She didn't die in the hospital on a machine. She died surrounded by flowers she had planted."

At Hindman

Arnow is remembered as an outspoken, intelligent, and independent woman who possessed a dry wit. Brosi calls Arnow "perhaps the best writer to have ever emerged from the Appalachian South" and believes he knows why her work isn't nationally known as widely as it should be. "She wasn't a good self-promoter. She just could not gush up to people she had no respect for," Brosi says. "She was an unreconstructed hillbilly, so the national promoters didn't push her. Because she was unapologetically on the left politically, the Kentucky chauvinists didn't push her either."

From the inception in 1977 of the Appalachian Writers Workshop at the Hindman Settlement School, Arnow was a pivotal part of its staff. She came to the workshop at the invitation of her close friend, poet Albert Stewart. Arnow and

"She was an unreconstructed hillbilly, so the national promoters didn't push her. Because she was unapologetically on the left politically, the Kentucky chauvinists didn't push her either."

— George Brosi

James Still were the first people to teach the fiction sessions at the workshop, and she stayed on staff for the next eight years, right up until her death.

In its earliest years, the staff members received the manuscripts submitted by workshop participants on the first night of the workshop — and they had no length restrictions. Arnow sometimes had to read whole novel manuscripts over the course of only two days. "She read every word. She must have sometimes stayed up all night," novelist and poet George Ella Lyon writes in *Crossing Troublesome,* a new anthology celebrating 25 years of the Writers Workshop that she edited with poet Leatha Kendrick.

Mike Mullins, executive director of the Hindman Settlement School, says, "Participants told me that a critiquing session with Mrs. Arnow was one of the most frightening experiences that they had ever had — but also one of the most rewarding. They all said they felt they had gotten their money's worth for the workshop once they had met with her."

Her Legacy

"She was small, quick, intense, keen," says Lyon. "A passionate, fierce teacher. She liked bourbon and branch water. She dressed simply, was an extremely hard worker who wrote out of a historical, social, and political consciousness. She had a sense of humor so low-key, you had to look again to see if she meant it. Then you would catch the smile in her eyes."

"One of my favorite memories is of her sitting on the floor in the corner of the living room, with a cigarette in one hand and a glass of bourbon and ice in the other," says Mullins. "She was just listening to the conversations that were taking place."

> "Participants told me that a critiquing session with Mrs. Arnow was one of the most frightening experiences that they had ever had — but also one of the most rewarding."
>
> — Mike Mullins

"Harriette was brusque," says Brosi. "In her case, this made her delightful because what irritated her were exactly the things that would be vexing to everybody, but that more shallow people miss. The depth of her insights about people and how they work is unexcelled. Her writing illustrates perhaps more strongly than that of any other 20th-century American writer how society's dysfunctions impact individuals."

Sandra Ballard, the editor of *Appalachian Journal,* is widely considered to be the authoritative voice on Arnow. She met her only once and recalls that event with a sense of awe that is still very much evident. Ballard read *Hunter's Horn* and was so overwhelmed that she devoured everything else that Arnow had written. "When I finished that book, I couldn't get it out of my head," she says. Ballard was so fascinated by Arnow's writing that she also read everything she could about the writer and eventually formed friendships with many of Arnow's family members and friends.

Presently she is at work on an eagerly awaited biography of Arnow. "Her work shows us the human costs of poverty, of obsessions, and of migration," Ballard says. "She gave us an unforgettable picture of what happened to Americans who stayed home during World War II."

Among Ballard's prized possessions is a photocopy of a tracing James Still did of Arnow's hand. "He didn't have a camera but instead had the habit of making a memento by tracing the hand of a person who came to visit him. He had Harriette to sign the tracing," Ballard recounts in *Crossing Troublesome.* "She dated it August 9, 1961, and he wrote along the top of the page, 'The hand that wrote *The Dollmaker.*'"

In 1999, the University Press of Michigan posthumously published another novel, *Between the Flowers.* Rabid fans, who were still hungry for more, snatched the book up. Today, interest is still rising. The National Endowment for the Arts recently approved a generous grant to fund the Harriette Arnow Tourism Project, which will include an annual Arnow lecture at Somerset Community College in Kentucky. At Somerset, well-known writers will not only read from their own work and talk about Arnow but will also read from her work. The project is also striving to make people more aware of Arnow's writing and provide information for those interested in knowing more about Arnow's life. Bev Olert, director of the project, says, "We want to make sure her spirit is kept alive. We have lots of different ideas about promoting her work and using her books to promote cultural tourism in the region of her birth."

Olert says it is obvious that more people admire Arnow's work than we realize. "Her gravesite near Keno, Ky., is constantly being visited by readers," she says, even though Arnow's survivors haven't opened the family's farm to the public. "Although the location of her grave is a well-guarded secret, Arnow's fans are determined people. They always manage to find it."

Arnow has instructed generations of writers to be themselves and to present their culture in an accurate, honest way, warts and all. Arnow was never ashamed of where she was from — in fact, she was incredibly proud of her roots. On the other hand, she also never shied away from the problems — sometimes self-imposed — that plagued Appalachia. Her work, although firmly anchored in place, transcended any regional boundaries, and she was one of the first so-called "Appalachian writers" who accepted that her work could be universal.

> Sandra Ballard read *Hunter's Horn* and was so overwhelmed that she devoured everything else that Arnow had written. "When I finished that book, I couldn't get it out of my head."

Although her fans wish that more people knew Arnow's work, in many ways, it seems appropriate that Arnow is not more widely known. She didn't write to be on the bestseller lists or to be included in the literary canon or to be idolized by millions. She wrote because she couldn't not write, because she had plenty to say. She wrote because she loved the written word and the power it held. This is her legacy — the words. N&T

Silas House's second novel, A Parchment of Leaves, *was recently published by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. Currently working on* Anneth and Easter, *a prequel to his first novel,* Clay's Quilt, *he lives in Lily, Ky., with his wife Teresa and two daughters, Cheyenne and Olivia.*

Appalachian Steward Ed Bingham

by Tal Stanley

A pioneer in Appalachian Studies, Ed Bingham kept the land and its people the focus of his life, thought, and teaching.

Years before there were curricula in Appalachian Studies, before there was an Appalachian Studies Association or magazines devoted to the study and exploration of all things Appalachian, Edgar Bingham was teaching and writing about the region.

Born in 1921 in the shadow of Grandfather Mountain in Western North Carolina, Ed Bingham received his earliest formal education in North Carolina's public schools. World War II and service in the United States Navy, from February 1942 to October 1945, interrupted his college education. While in the Navy, he served with the first battalions of Marines on Guadalcanal.

Following the war, Ed attended Lees-McRae College, Appalachian State University, and the University of Tennessee, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in geography in 1948. In 1954, he earned his doctorate from Ohio State University.

He moved to Emory & Henry (E&H) in Southwest Virginia in 1953, where he taught geography until his retirement in 1989. During his tenure at E&H, Ed served as registrar, dean of admissions, director of placement, assistant academic dean, chair of the social science division, and professor of geography. His colleagues elected him to numerous faculty committees, including a four-year term as faculty representative to the board of trustees. During his career, he was a member of various professional organizations, including the Association of American Geographers and the American Association of University Professors.

Ed was an accomplished and skilled cartographer, his maps being carefully crafted, intricate, and magnificent works of art. He published widely, but his work on Appalachian geography and planning issues stands out. His earliest work includes: Physiographic Diagram of Central Appalachians *and* A Physiographic Diagram of North Carolina. *The article "Geography in the Small Liberal Arts College: A View from Inside" appeared in the* Memorandum Folio of the S.E. Division of the Association of American Geographers *in 1967.*

In his later work, Ed articulated a place-based vision for the region in articles such as "Appalachia: Underdeveloped or Wrongly Developed" in a 1972 issue of The Virginia Geographer. *He also wrote book chapters such as "Impact of Recreational Development on Pioneer Lifestyles in Southern Appalachia" in the 1976 publication* Redemption Denied: An Appalachian Reader, *edited by Edward Guinan, and "Rural Perspectives on Urban Expansion: A Neglected Dimension in Planning" included in* Planning Frontiers in Rural America: A Report to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *published in 1976 by the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on Rural Development. Ed also contributed "A Bibliography of Appalachian Geography" to the autumn 1977 issue of the* Appalachian Journal.

Ed and his wife Gini made several trips to India, and his observations and insights from those experiences filled his life and thought, both in and beyond the classroom. Ed died on November 5, 1999. Gini died in the early autumn of 2002.

TEACHER. NEIGHBOR. MENTOR. FRIEND. ED BINGHAM daily wove the callings of his life into a seamless garment that he offered to all of us.

I knew Ed when I was his student. Later when I returned to Southwest Virginia's Emory & Henry College as a member of the faculty, he was my neighbor. Through it all, he was a friend. Only later, after he was dead and I had begun to understand what I had lost, did I recognize him as my mentor.

He stood at my backdoor, the midsummer sunlight falling around him, white and fierce in its heat. As was his way, he stood with his head cocked to one side, a wry smile sneaking across his face. "There are plenty of Yellow Transparents on that apple tree behind the house, more than Gini and I can use. Please bring the children and some buckets, and you can get all you want. They'll make very good apple sauce."

Later that afternoon, as the light and heat eased, I and my two children, David and Sarah, pulling the wagon behind us, walked up the hill to Ed and Gini Bingham's house. Stooping under the bending limbs of a tree that Ed had planted some forty years before, Ed, Gini, my children, and I gathered the soft yellow apples in buckets, baskets, and bags, shooing away yellow jackets and talking of apples, the making of sauce, and the culture of old apple trees. His hands were as gnarled as the limbs of the tree. With every stoop, he was teaching my children: "Don't leave behind the ones that are soft and brown. They are still good" and "The bees won't bother you if you don't bother them" and "This is good soil for apple trees. This tree has always done well here." Under the tree that afternoon, long after the day he had left the classroom for the last time, he was still teaching, still encouraging, still allowing the land, the place, and its people to be the focus of his life, thought, and teaching.

Emory & Henry College

Ed Bingham works closely with a student on a project during the 1983-84 school year at Emory & Henry College in Emory, Va.

A geographer by discipline, he focused on land reform and the sustenance that came from the land. Undergirding all his work was his abiding belief that the land, when well-used and cared for, can make us a better people. Ed Bingham knew that all places were the result of eons of interaction and interdependence among the natural environment, the built environment, and human culture. He saw his calling as being a steward of Appalachia and its places, of its traditional culture, its varied and complex environments, and its long human history that predated the arrival of European settlers. Ed believed that all places, in their simplicity and beauty, were intricately complex and related to the unfathomable, unknowable expanses of creation. That belief was the bedrock of his stewardship.

Ed's stewardship had many expressions, not the least of which was in his work as an educator. In his daily work at E&H, Ed was the model of what a liberal arts teacher should be. All of his work was interdisciplinary, with clear and definite commitments to social justice, economic and political democracy, and racial equality.

He easily recognized the students who were adrift, young women and men who could not quite find their way and felt themselves out of place in college. Ed was able to see in them what no one was able to see, to articulate what their gifts and talents were, and to point, graciously and gently, these students to paths that would change their lives. He empowered them to find and claim their own better natures and their native talents and gifts. I saw it happen many times, and it happened to me in ways that I am just now coming to understand and appreciate more than twenty years after I first sat in his class.

Ed set a fire under students, pointing out to them the way of rigorous intellectual questioning. As persistently as a mountain creek wearing away the rocks along its banks, Ed's teaching worked against the ingrained prejudices we receive from our culture, teaching us that to be an educated person also meant that we were stewards of the earth and all its people. Because of Ed's work in the classroom, today throughout the mountains and beyond, there are geographers, planners, educators, ministers, lawyers, doctors, and ordinary citizens who understand the beautiful totality of creation. They know that in their life and work, they too are called to be stewards of creation.

Ed's stewardship of this place also involved his quiet and unassuming leadership on the E&H faculty and his maddening tendency to raise to the institution and its administrators the most morally piercing and thorny of questions.

During the early days of the civil rights struggle, Ed often asked why E&H was slow to admit persons of color. When capital funds campaigns were launched, Ed never failed to question why hourly wage staff and custodial personnel were not paid a living wage. When financial pressures and private ambitions threatened E&H's traditional focus on providing education to first-generation Appalachian students, Ed was an impas-

sioned advocate of maintaining the College's traditional calling to people of the region.

Intuitively, as close to himself as the marrow of his bones, Ed knew that E&H was a liberal arts college, and as such, the education offered is of a piece: art, music, geography, history, chemistry, political science, biology, English, physical education, religion, the sports teams, conversations in the dining hall and classrooms. For Ed, each discipline carried its particular insights into the native dignity, grace, courage, and beauty of the human spirit. Each discipline helped provide us with the tools necessary to define, for our place and time, the good humane life.

He easily recognized the students who were adrift, young women and men who could not quite find their way and felt themselves out of place in college. Ed was able to see in them what no one was able to see.

From his long career at E&H, two images of Ed endure and enrich my own work.

One evening in May in 1980, with the library windows raised to admit the cool spring air, I — along with four or five students studying for final exams — watched from a window as Ed Bingham and three of his colleagues played the most ferocious and profane tennis doubles match any of us students had ever seen. Throughout the match, while his colleagues swore and missed and fouled, Ed persistently drove the shots where he wanted them, quietly, almost silently, but also good-naturedly, taunting his opponents, tolerating his teammate's mistakes. Through it all, his eyes were on the goal and the disciplined work that would take his team there. There is also the image of Ed talking with his hands, his fingers spread wide apart, or with one arm slung over his own shoulder as he listened to students, helping them through their troubles to new discoveries.

Beside his desk in Fulton Hall sat a rocker, a high-backed thing with a split-oak bottom. He had positioned the rocker so that those who occupied it faced Ed head on, eyeball to eyeball. In that room, we were equals, drawn together through learning but also by the love of this good place and of all places. We became committed to the precept that when we worked together for the common good, all places and all people would be better, stronger, more fully what we were called to be. At Ed's funeral, dozens of former students from across the years spoke of the conversations they had had with Ed while sitting in that chair.

Ed's influence at E&H was profound and enduring. However, though it is often unrecognized now, his influence in the region, his contributions in the early days of Appalachian Studies is equally enduring. As a world geographer and community planner, Ed intimately knew the damages colonialism visited on the people and places of Appalachia. He used the example of British colonialism in India to explain to his students the political, economic, and cultural terror of oppression. He drew parallels between the British in India and the industrial capitalists who came into Appalachia and worked with local elites, beginning in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, to exploit and control Appalachia's vast natural resources. His writings on colonialism were formative for many of the first practitioners of Appalachian Studies.

This same incisive understanding of colonialism led Ed to critique in the strongest possible terms the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Ed saw the ARC's policies and decisions as wrong-headed, insensitive to the region's traditional cultures, and destructive of people and places. The answer to the region's economic questions and issues was not in road projects or megadams and reservoirs but in planning and policies that responded to the subtleties of the place, looking to make every place inhabitable and sustainable many long years into the future.

Ed's regional vision and scholarship found their life and breath in his passion for his homeplace: Watauga County, North Carolina. Ed's soul, having witnessed the destruction of that place through unplanned growth, hurt for his native Watauga County. He was unrelenting, fearless, and forthright in his denunciation of the greed behind all of that development. Through a brief term on the Washington County (Virginia) Planning Commission and his activity in questions of development and justice, Ed worked to see that the same destruction and wanton misuse of land did not happen in Washington County, the place he claimed as his home.

For over forty years, the people of this place came to recognize Ed for his undying compassion for others and his tireless commitment to social justice.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, race relations in Washington County were difficult. The percentage of persons of color in the county being relatively small, the African American community often had a difficult time mustering the necessary support to lobby for rights and recognition. Through it all, Ed and Gini Bingham were steady and sure allies. Persons of color were often guests in their home. Ed and Gini were financial supporters of community centers for African American neighborhoods, they joined advocacy groups that fought for racial justice, and they welcomed the inclusion of persons of color in their church. When county citizens began to form an anti-poverty organization designed to address the desperate needs of the people of poverty in this place, Ed and Gini were vocal and energetic supporters.

Ed's influence at Emory & Henry was profound and enduring. However, though it is often unrecognized now, his influence in the region, his contributions in the early days of Appalachian Studies is equally enduring.

Listening to and learning from their daughter, Kathy, who was eighteen in 1968, they came to see the Vietnam War as a singular moral crisis. Joining their daughter in her opposition to the war in Vietnam, they took a very unpopular stand by supporting her against schoolteachers who wanted to silence her.

When threatened and ostracized, they responded with tolerance. When encouraged to leave to find a place more open to their views, they chose to stay.

Eventually, Ed and Gini came to oppose all armed conflict and open aggression, civil or martial. At the time of his death, the bumper sticker on Ed's truck, "One Nuclear Bomb Can Ruin Your Whole Day," resonated with Ed's long advocacy of peace in every place, with his understanding of sustainable development, and with his opposition to colonialism in the region. In all these things, Ed and Gini were able to transcend the middle-class condescension that often accrues to college faculty and to reach across boundaries, claiming a real partnership and solidarity with all the people of this place.

Together, Ed and Gini lived out the same respectful, holistic approach to life that Ed advocated in the classroom, among his faculty colleagues, and in the community. Theirs was a relationship founded on a mutual respect and admiration of the talents of the other, the uniqueness each brought, the heart-gifts born of sharing and of commitments lived out.

For the last thirty years of her life, Gini was a potter, and Ed built several kilns for the firing of her work. Ed carried the bags of clay and minerals she used for her glazes, carefully placing the freshly thrown pieces in the kilns, and just as carefully removing the glazed and finished pieces after the firing. Ed's biscuits were famous in our neighborhood, as were Gini's pies. Together they maintained a rich herb and flower garden. From their living room, they watched bluebirds, hummingbirds, cardinals, jays, thrushes, and a host of birds enjoy the gracious place they had created for them in the garden. On their morning walks, they collected both wildflowers and cast-off aluminum cans. The flowers Gini placed on their kitchen table in a vase she had made. The aluminum Ed saved and sold to benefit an emergency medical fund at a clinic in Konnarock, serving low-income persons of that area of Washington County.

Their relationship was a quest to experience as much of creation's beauty as they could find, wherever it was to be found and celebrated. They saw that beauty in poetry, in children's books well-written, in students, in neighbors, in the light of the sun, in ripe Yellow Transparent apples, in Appalachia and in India, among their friends at church and among friends who never frequented the church, in the birds of the air, in the young children who seemed to gather around them.

The beauty Ed and Gini saw around them and the beauty they helped create, Ed's work in the region, in the classroom, and as a faculty member were all tempered in the refining fire of terrible grief. In 1970, Kathy, their only child, died. Ed lived twenty-nine more years, and they were all lived in response to the gifts Kathy brought them and the lessons Ed and Gini learned in their grieving.

In moments of introspection and sharing, Ed often remarked that his life was deeply and irrevocably changed in the crucible of that grief. Yet where others turned to bitterness and isolation, Ed and Gini turned outward to others, to seek and see and work for a better world defined less in sorrow than in joy, less in despair than in hope. Ed's daily efforts to reach out to his students and to his neighbors' children were part of his and Gini's efforts to make sense and meaning from their sorrow. Creation became for Ed part of this long healing process. In that process, not only was Ed healed as much as anyone could be who has faced such harrowing loss, but he also became a healer, one of the wise ones who cares for the earth, its places, and its people.

Three months after we had gathered the Yellow Transparents, my blue grapes were hanging heavy on the vine. I saw Ed on his morning walk. "Come and get some. There's a gracious plenty," I said. He brought a bucket, and we ate and gathered the grapes as we talked of vines and pruning and training and teaching.

Months later, the winter almost over, Ed called to me to come and help him divide daylilies. "There's some I want you to have," he said, "and some gladiola bulbs, too."

I cannot tell you exactly which daylilies he gave me, nor can I point to the exact gladiola bulbs he shared. However, this past summer, in the June sun, the daylilies bloomed with the most graceful yellow I have ever seen. Among the phlox and dahlias and hydrangea and daisies of late summer, as the grapes ripened, there were the glads, bending their beauty to the earth. And just now, as I write this, a student has left my office, telling me of troubles and discoveries, and the rocking chair in my office still moves with Ed's memory. N&T

Tal Stanley works in the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry College in Emory, Va. When he is not at work, he is cooking or gardening or tending to his chickens; he takes inordinate pride in his vegetable garden.

Bluegrass Conversion: Jimmie Hears Ralph Stanley and His Clinch Mountain Boys Rip Through a Blue Yodel, 1985

For RLJ

Ah! The yodel breaks and fiddle takes
woe octaves into nameless origin
before the banjo player spills a thousand
notes in half a verse. The bass shakes
the floorboards, rocks the support beams under
wide planks of pine. My spine mushrooms in glory.
Troubles bump this back road of story
the singer draws from air with snarls of thunder.

Save me, Mister Guitar, steer this kicking
mule. Your pulled and hammered cross-picked pattern
pushes pitch ahead and behind time.
Keys cascade. Far up the neck picking
finds a hidden creek when the soul yearns
for water. Take my clothes, I'm home in slime.

—Michael Graber

Michael Graber's poem comes out of an experience at a festival outside of Asheville, N.C. He lives in Memphis, but his first child was born in Asheville and they visit annually. His poems have been published in Painted Bride Quarterly *and in the anthology* A Fine Excess, *from Sarabande Books.*

Harvey J. Miller
The Sage of Pigeon Roost

by Dot Jackson

An old friend fondly remembers a columnist from the Western North Carolina mountains who wrote about what really mattered.

When the peepers awake a few weeks from now, filling the greening, stream-side thickets with the oldest song on earth, some of us will think wistfully of Harvey J. Miller.

For nearly 70 years, Harvey J. reported the news from the small rural community of Pigeon Roost and Lower Mitchell County, N.C. He wrote for papers in Johnson City and Kingsport, Tenn., and, throughout nearly half a century, for the *Tri-County News* in Spruce Pine, N.C.

It was none of this ephemeral stuff of world leaders bullying each other or celebrities bedding and un-wedding. The news from Pigeon Roost was whatever mattered — day by day, season by season — over the long haul of human existence. The promise of spring mattered a lot in the icebound coves of Appalachia. The celebratory line in Harvey's newspaper columns, a line that eventually traveled to a far-flung, almost cult-like audience of thousands, varied but little year to year.

"The pete frogs is singing on Pigeon Roost tonight."

What pleasure, in its poetic spareness, that news must have brought to the farmer in Relief, N.C., who "had the misfortune," Harvey reported in January 1964, "for his cow to fall on the frozen ground Sunday and get hurt very bad. Monday morning he got some men to help load the cow on a sled and hauled her in and put her under the barn shed. The last report is the cow could eat very good but could not stand on her feet."

Harvey's neighbors depended on their cows a lot more than they did on the stock market. That was most certainly true of the Ray Barnetts of Pigeon Roost, who provided Harvey with his top story of 1963 "in which the Barnetts became the parents of a baby girl, their 16th child."

Over the roughly Biblical three-score-and-ten years in which Harvey gathered his stories, he rejoiced in the births, reported the marriages, and lamented the fading health and death of numerous neighbors; he literally saw them from cradle to grave.

Born in 1909 and raised in a log cabin on Lower Pigeon Roost Creek, Harvey was 12 when he wrote his first column. It ran in the daily *Johnson City Staff,* and, as he wrote 53 years later in a special all-Harvey J. Miller winter 1974 edition of *Foxfire* magazine, it was about his dog.

> It is not clear whether Harvey ever owned a car, but he didn't have one in later life and didn't need it anyway. The news tended to find him.

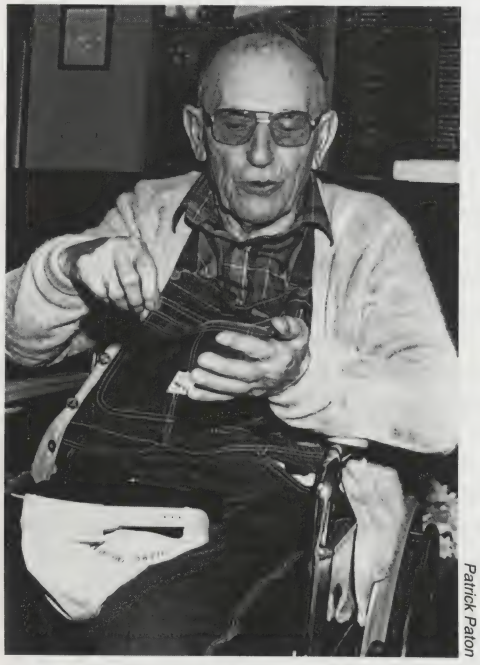
"My favorite hunting dog named Mack, while chasing a squirrel, climbed

up inside a hollow chestnut tree for over thirty feet and come out a knot hole and set on a limb while watching the squirrel get away by jumping from tree to tree. I did not know what to do because of my dog that had climbed the high tree. How could he get down? If he jumped he would get killed!"

Among the most joyous days in my life were those spent driving up Pigeon Roost at a time when Harvey J. was free to come along.

Well, amazingly, Mack did jump, turned over and over in the air, landed on his feet, and took off after the squirrel again. "As this was such a lucky experience, I decided this should be in the newspapers," Harvey said. That night, he wrote a brief account of Mack's adventure, added the observation that "there is something like this happening here all along," and next morning mailed it off to Johnson City.

"Within a few days," he said, "I received a letter from the editor that they had accepted me as their country news correspondent from this area." They would send him the paper daily, and "they was sending me stamped envelopes for me to mail in my news."



Patrick Paton

Even after he quit writing, Harvey J. Miller, at the Brian Center in 1996, still talked about what he knew and thought and what was in his heart.

At the time that he became a writer by profession, Harvey had made it through the sixth grade. He let it go at that. He never quit his day job as a farmer. It is not clear whether he ever owned a car, but he didn't have one in later life and didn't need it anyway. The news tended to find him.

From his fields of corn and tobacco, he observed the flights of geese, the migration of butterflies and phoebe-birds, the ice clouds portending storm and snow. At day's end, inside by the wood stove, the telephone rang incessantly with flashes from all over.

With crops laid by, in good weather Harvey sat on the porch of the house where he and his wife, Edith, and their children, Ethel, Ronald, and Eloise, lived on the dirt road going up Pigeon Roost. He and his brother Fonzer — a gentle, tongue-tied man who was nevertheless a masterful storyteller — watched for cars coming up the road, stirring dust. Whoever came by was apt to stop.

Among the most joyous days in my life were those spent driving up Pigeon Roost at a time when Harvey J. was free to come along. "Now go up thisaway," he would say, and the travelogue began.

His speech was slow and droll, reminiscent of the delivery of W.C. Fields, enriched by distinctive regional vernacular. "Pull up, yonder. 'At ol' house, it's so full of haints, hit's a wonder they ain't just carried it off. See them holes in the yard? People has dug up the place all over a-lookin' for buried money. Not many goes in the house, though …"

We drive along a wild stretch of Toe River past an ancient upheaval of boulders that break up the current into churning, small channels. A spray-paint artist, maybe more than one, has been at work. Undecipherable figures, not-quite-letters, blobs, and runny jots and tittles decorate the rocks and concrete supports of a nearby road bridge. What kind of primitive expression are we seeing? What deep meanings?

Harvey sighs. "Hit's them old brainwarshed boys does that," he says. What kind of boys? How old are they? "Oh, I reck'n they're 28 or 9," he says, a little bit disgusted. "They got nothin' else to do."

Harvey knows of a house for rent that is the perfect place (he says) for a writer to work undisturbed. Or, it turns out, more or less undisturbed. "Let's go up Brummetts Creek," he says. So we go, bumping along on one of those roads that reminds us why the pioneers favored ox-drawn sleds over anything with axles and wheels.

We go through a tight cut with vertical, sheep-grazed hills on either side and come out, at last, into a broad green cove, a lovely place. A little white house sits at the base of a hill, neat and friendly. Isolated — and empty. "Fifty acre," says Harvey, speculatively. "Rent real cheap. Furniture and everything." Indeed. What a bargain!

Tourists and summer people staying in the Roan Mountain-Spruce Pine vicinity would buy a *Tri-County News* and discover Harvey. They would subscribe, carry and share his columns everywhere, and write him mountains of fan mail.

We enter by a back screen door into the kitchen. There is a wood stove, a Hoosier cabinet, a sink with a pitcher pump at the ready. A couple of other rooms, an iron bed, some ladder-back chairs. "You'd get along fine here," Harvey ventures. "Nothin' to bother you atall."

Looks like a deal. Who gets the check?

Harvey leans on the kitchen door frame, a little tentative. "Just one thing," he says. "Don't let t'at ol' man bother you. He just comes to get his war-ter."

What old man?

"One 'at gets his war-ter here," says Harvey. "No harm in 'im. He only comes of a night."

Well — that's all right. But why at night?

"'At's just when he comes."

Uh, where does he live that he has to come here for water?

"Oh, he *don't* live. Used to live here, I reck'n. Folks say he just comes in of a night, don't slam the door or nothin'. They just hear 'at ol' pump agoin' creak-*creak,* creak-*creak* ... "

So much for that jewel of seclusion. Next we go up to Buladean to see Harvey's friend Thomas Campbell, who is at the time a little past 100 years old, still making rakes and hoes to sell, sewing for people, keeping a sparkling house. At night, he sits down and reads his Bible without glasses.

On every outing, for dozens of miles around, Harvey waves at people passing by, and they know him. Tourists and summer people staying in the Roan Mountain-Spruce Pine vicinity would buy a *Tri-County News* and discover Harvey. They would subscribe, carry and share his columns everywhere, and write him mountains of fan mail. Now, there were a few local folks who, Harvey said, were critical — "those who thought I wrote too personal about the citizens." But it was the "personal" that made him so beloved. Among his greatest fans were writers from other bigger papers who marveled at the simple efficiency and occasional eloquence of his language. Maybe more than that, they discovered that he told great stories.

Harvey wrote the way he talked. This was not by way of design, but simply dictated by the fact that he communicated best in his primary language. It was a language shared by many of his readers and found charming, if "quaint," by many more. He also wrote what he knew and thought and what he felt in his heart, and that is a virtue permitted only rarely in the media today.

Harvey wrote what he knew and thought and what he felt in his heart, and that is a virtue permitted only rarely in the media today.

Having found out about Harvey through one of *Foxfire* magazine's subscribers, the students at Foxfire in Rabun Gap, Ga., spent many days with him, exploring his part of the mountains. Foxfire is a project begun in the 1960s at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in the North Georgia mountains in which students interview elders about "affairs of plain living."

The youngsters have produced a massively successful series of magazines and books. In the winter of 1974, the students devoted a whole issue of *Foxfire* magazine to clips from just 23 years of his columns. It was a big seller. He later brought out another book himself: *The News from Pigeon Roost, Volume II.* It was a short collection of stories that were longer than most of his column entries.

Harvey was getting old when he and Edith moved off Pigeon Roost and down to a busy neighborhood in Spruce Pine. The move did not set well with him. He lost his home base, and he was too fragile to bond with another. At last, in 1989 he quit writing, and his health declined radically. He died in February 1997 after several years in a nursing home.

Years earlier, Harvey had begun to write, now and then, expressing his dismay with the way the world was moving: "Times is not like it used to be, as we all say. ... Used to, I wrote the news as I got it and people called for more of that kind. ... But now some people wants the news what they read played up in the style of writing of this day and age."

The new "style" Harvey was talking about — sterile, colorless, tell-too-little-to-get-sued-over, and, above all, without passion — has not served to foster rampant readership. Far more likely to do that is the writer who can approach the smell of a skunk with Harvey J. Miller's unaffected grace: "Early these foggy mornings in this hilly country, the odor of polecats can be sniffed on the mountain breeze which is a good sign of a very warm climate to prevail."

Almost makes a body want to be there ... N&T

Dot Jackson lives in Pickens County, S.C., where there are plenty of haints and smart cows and ol' brain-warshed boys — but nary a storyteller like Harvey J. Miller, who was simply one of a kind.

A 'Tater-Diggin' Cow

by Harvey J. Miller

A red cow belonging to H.J. Miller of Pigeon Roost, who earned the title to her name early last fall as a 'tater-diggin' cow, has again proved herself useful by doing a job most needful.

The name of 'tater-diggin' was bestowed upon the cow after it was learned that she could take her front foot and pull 'taters out of the ground faster than old man Miller could himself.

However, it was later learned there was a drawback to her 'tater-diggin' career. She did it to her advantage. She would crawl through a fence and slip into the 'tater patch — dig 'taters as fast as she could, in seven or eight hills; then she would light in and try to eat ever last one of 'em.

Now here comes another story about the cow — that is, of making roads in the deep snow here and there around the home of Miller. That was good to take the job away from him as he was too poor in health to do it himself.

Miller reports the cow made several trips trudging through the twelve inches of snow, first going from her place at the barn to the house; then when this snow trail was completed, she made a similar road from spring to house, which would be the roads most traveled.

But when she started to fix another road from the house to the highway, Miller must have thought it was too long a pilgrimage in the snow, for he went a nearer way — headed her off and flagged her down with a little bucket of 16 percent dairy feed.

Understand this, though — this was after she had made the necessary snow trails and he had already thought of the new names — 'tater-diggin' and snow-trampin' cow. She always earns her names the hard way. Miller said he was going to keep his fingers crossed from now on as to what jobs on his farm the cow could perform to keep her name in the news, as there is no doubt she will never earn a famous name as a milk champion.

From the Tri-County News, *February 25, 1960.*

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The Remarkable Baseball Career of Pete Gray

by Jay Howes and Christine Goldbeck

A determined ballplayer from the Pennsylvania coalfields didn't let limitations stop him from achieving beyond the realm of the ordinary.

Pete Gray, a native of Northern Appalachia, has an interesting place in baseball lore. Despite the fact that he has not played ball for more than half a century, many avid fans of the game still know his name. It's kind of difficult, after all, to forget a baseball hero who rose out of the Appalachian Pennsylvania coalfields. Then, too, Gray played the game in the major leagues with only one arm.

A 30-something Harrisburg, Pa., professional, Charles McDonald, recognized the name immediately. "He was the most famous .218 hitter in major-league history since he did it with only one arm. Played for the St. Louis Browns in the 1940s — never really got a fair shake after one good year."

Pete Gray, born Peter J. Wyshner on March 16, 1915, in Nanticoke, Pa., is best known in baseball circles for achieving a moderate degree of success playing this most difficult of sports with only one arm. Had he been 100 percent physically sound, no fan today would know his name.

As it is, the custom-made glove of this man who played in only 77 major league games resides in the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, N.Y. It's true that there was a dearth of available talent during World War II in the mid-1940s (even hitting great Ted Williams was serving his country overseas during the 1943-45 seasons, potentially the prime years of his historic career). And it's also true that Bill Veeck, baseball's renowned promotional stuntman who once sent a midget to the plate, owned the team for which Gray played. Still, neither fact should detract from what Gray accomplished in terms of pure athletics, despite the adversity of a physical disability.

Making the Big Leagues

Located just south of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Nanticoke lies toward the northern end of the anthracite, or hard coal, belt of Pennsylvania's Appalachian region. Coal was king in that area in the early 1900s, and the mines bred tough, gritty, tenacious men — men who were part of what journalist Tom Brokaw has dubbed "The Greatest Generation." But it was also the Golden Age of baseball, and young boys everywhere dreamed of making it to the big leagues. Perhaps it was the convergence of these two factors that underlay Gray's determination to overcome his physical disability and become a professional ballplayer. Or maybe he merely saw his natural athletic ability as his only means of "getting out of the mines," as so many of that place and time wished.

Naturally right-handed, Gray had his dominant arm amputated at the age of six after falling off the running board of a truck and getting it entwined in the spokes of a wheel. Nonetheless, he taught himself to catch, throw, and bat, using only his left arm. Rising through the ranks of the semipro teams found

It was in 1944 that Gray, still with Memphis and nearing 30 years old, put together a remarkable season that would take him to his dream of a major league contract.

throughout the Pennsylvania coal towns of the day, he moved to the fabled semi-pro Brooklyn Bushwicks and in 1942 signed a professional contract with Three Rivers of the Canadian-American league. Hitting .381 for them, he attracted the attention of Memphis in the old Southern Association minor league and spent two years roaming the South with them, playing games in various small cities of the Southern Appalachians.

It was in 1944 that Gray, still with Memphis and nearing 30 years old, put together a remarkable season that would take him to his dream of a major league contract. He had developed a unique technique for catching the ball — tucking his glove under the stump of his right arm as the ball rolled across his chest, re-grasping the ball, and throwing it all in one motion. That, combined with his speed and range, allowed him to play an outstanding centerfield. In addition, he hit .333, stole 68 bases, and even managed to hit five home runs. These statistics resulted in Gray getting serious notice from major league scouts, being named "Player of the Year for the Southern Association," and, the ultimate prize, having the St. Louis Browns purchase his contract for the 1945 season.

During that year, he appeared in 77 major league games and had 51 hits and 13 RBIs. His eye at the plate and control of the bat were so good that he struck out only 11 times in 234 at bats.

In athletics, as in other endeavors, conventional wisdom says everyone has their "career day" or "15 minutes of fame." Gray's came on May 20, 1945, when he was greeted at Yankee Stadium in New York City by a standing ovation from 36,000 fans of the opposing team. He proceeded to help the Browns win a doubleheader with four hits, 2 RBIs, and two runs scored, including the winning run of the second game. In addition, he flawlessly handled nine chances in the outfield.

Despite more than holding his own as a player and, more importantly, wanting to be recognized and respected for simply being a major league ballplayer, it was inevitable in that era that Gray be treated as a curiosity, more gimmick and publicity stunt than player. Unlike pitcher Jim Abbott, who received universal acclaim for pitching a no-hitter with only one hand against the Cleveland Indians as a Yankee in 1993, Gray was often the subject of taunts and insults. Sportswriter Maury Allen wrote, "Instead of admiring the grit it took to play ball and actually make the big leagues with one arm, his teammates rode Gray mercilessly about his handicap." Gray took such things in stride, once telling a reporter, "If they insulted me, I didn't pay attention. I mostly kept to myself."

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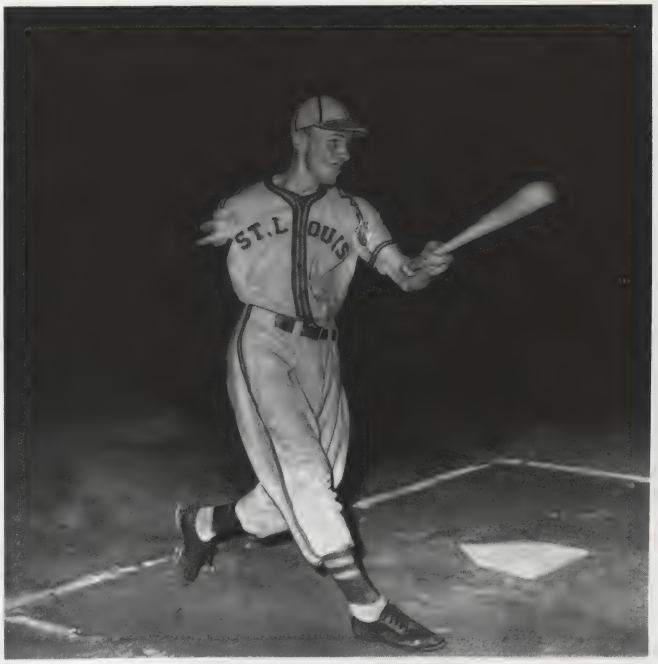
Back to the Minors

After his one season, the "real" major leaguers were returning from the war to fill rosters, and Gray was sent back to the minors. He sat out the 1947 season but tried to make a comeback in 1948 and again in 1949. Shortly afterwards, Gray left professional baseball but continued to barnstorm with exhibition teams into the 1950s, including one of the era's many "House of David" teams, famous for wearing long beards. (Unofficial House of David teams patterned themselves after barnstorming baseball teams used as a proselytizing tool by a Benton, Mich.-based religious community in the early part of the 20th century.) Interestingly, Gray refused to grow a beard, assuming he was already enough of an oddity. Upon retiring to his hometown of Nanticoke, Gray spent much of his time visiting veterans hospitals, giving encouragement and hope to amputees and other disabled war veterans.

Forty years after his season, his story was sought out and re-told in a 1986 television movie starring Keith Carradine called "A Winner Never Quits." The message delivered was one of the value of perseverance, hard work, and faith in dreams.

Pete Gray died in July 2002, but perhaps the most fitting eulogy had been written by a friend, admirer, and biographer seven years previously. In the epilogue of his 1995 book *One-Armed Wonder: Pete Gray, Wartime Baseball, and the American Dream,* William C. Kashatus wrote of Gray: "As a human being, he has demonstrated the ability to rise above the humble circumstances of his birth, and as a professional athlete, the determination to overcome the adversity of a physical disability. He always understood his limitations, but he never allowed them to get in the way of his success, nor prevent him from achieving beyond the realm of the ordinary." N&T



The Sporting News

Pete Gray bats for the St. Louis Browns, October 4, 1945.

Jay Howes is general manager of minecountry.com's Coal Region Book Nook and a policy analyst for the House Republican caucus at the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. A frequent contributor to Now & Then, *Christine Goldbeck is the author of* A Tribute to O'Hara and Other Stories *and editor of the* Anthracite History Journal *at minecountry.com.*

Stitches in Time

by Nancy Jane Earnest

A granddaughter remembers an enterprising, vibrant grandmother who taught her how to find her own place in the world.

She received letters during World War II from a son in North Africa addressed simply to "Granny, Elizabethton, Tennessee." They arrived as addressed without question. What common homemaker could have garnered that kind of respect and notoriety from an entire town?

That uncommon matriarch was my maternal grandmother, Mary Jackson Perry. As a late-arriving grandchild, I had no concept of the scope of her life or the depth of her quiet conviction that she could make the world a better place. To me, she was just Granny — my model, my stability, my champion, and my friend. She taught me to tie my shoe and drink tea properly, but best of all, she taught me that the most important thing I could be in life was myself and that with determination and a strong sense of my own strength, I could easily find my place in the world. The lessons came from an expert.

Courtesy of Nancy Jane Earnest

A savvy city girl with jet hair piled high, Mary Elizabeth Jackson made her way to Elizabethton, Tenn., in 1902.

Mary Elizabeth Jackson was born in New Albany, Indiana, on June 19, 1881. Headstrong and independent, she wanted to be a nurse, but her parents didn't consider nursing a proper career for their daughter. Instead, she was sent to New York City at the turn of the 20th century to study millinery at a time when ladies' hats were incredible feats of engineering as well as lofty works of art.

The city agreed with her spirit, but she was intrigued when her school's director told her about a telegram received from my future grandfather, Nathaniel Taylor Perry, owner of a dry goods store on the banks of the Doe River in the small East Tennessee town of Elizabethton. In the telegram, he requested a good milliner.

Courtesy of Nancy Jane Earnest

Almost disappearing in front of a blooming hydrangea bush, Granny models one of her own millinery creations.

Courtesy of Nancy Jane Earnest

A late addition to the family, the author, at 19 months, plays on the porch with her Granny and 24-year-old brother, Jack Whisnant.

Unbeknownst to Mary, he hoped to find a good wife as well. Mary headed south, tools in hand, embarking on the adventure that was her life.

A dubious welcome awaited her in Elizabethton that April Fools Day. She watched in soggy disbelief as the great flood of '02 roared through Mr. Perry's store, sweeping buttons, ribbons, tags, and trims literally out the door and down the Doe — but Mary stayed. Savvy city girl with jet hair piled high, she set up shop and began to design the magnificent hats that fashionable ladies wore to church on Sunday and "to call" on Tuesday afternoons when the washing was done.

She taught me to tie my shoe and drink tea properly, but best of all, she taught me that the most important thing I could be in life was myself and that with determination and a strong sense of my own strength, I could easily find my place in the world.

A physically active woman, she brought along her ice skates from Ohio River days, as well as the first ladies' bathing suit to be seen in Elizabethton. Mary unabashedly wore the stylish navy blue mohair-and-wool suit — complete with red trim, braid, and bloomers — as she dipped in the river that ran through the center of town. After a proper amount of time had passed, her utterly charmed boss made her his wife. He gave her six children, a finely furnished home, and free rein. She thrived, shrewd and strong, a woman with a mind for business and a knack for family.

Early on, after monitoring the declining profits of her husband's dry goods store, Mary sold the business while he was out of town on a sales trip. An easy-going man, my grandfather simply established another business, the Watauga Bottling Works, which produced Elizabethton's own brand of soda pop in the early part of the century. Mary, in turn, considered more profitable venues for her talents in what was fast becoming an unstable economy. As community matriarch, she outwitted the Depression and helped support her family by feeding Elizabethton's business population daily home-cooked meals from a tearoom in the center of town.

Amid shouts of playing children, the golden-scrolled treadle of her Singer sewing machine hummed daily as twilight fell on the Perry household, but she never charged a penny for her sewing. Routinely on Saturdays, working with the Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church, she helped round up the disadvantaged children in town for baths and then washed and mended their clothes so that the children could attend Sunday School the next day. She took her Christian call to service more seriously than most folks, even volunteering to "lay out the dead" of her church in the days before Elizabethton had the luxury of a funeral parlor. She dressed the deceased and arranged their hair, undaunted even by the tragic flu epidemic of 1918 when she once had to prepare four members of the same family.

Courtesy of Nancy Jane Earnest

Eight-year-old Nancy Jane strikes a winsome pose with her grandmother, who became a source of stability in her sometimes uncertain world.

Nancy Jane Earnest

At 97, Granny could still sing all the Sunday hymns by heart. She died peacefully a few weeks after the author took this photograph.

By the time I arrived in 1951 as the youngest grandchild, Granny was already seventy years old and living a quieter life. A widow since 1941, she had recently been joined in widowhood by her eldest daughter, Hazel, in the big green house on Hattie Avenue, a block away from Elizabethton's historic covered bridge and bustling downtown traffic.

My childhood visits with Granny and Aunt Hazel were spent in the bliss of Doe River wading, ice cream cones, Scrabble, and 10-cent movies. Occasionally I succumbed to baths in a big washtub on Granny's screened-in porch and protested as she untangled my long blonde hair before restoring it to shiny braids through the miracle of Suave hair dressing. She rocked me in the huge white wicker chair on the front porch, read to me, and helped

Courtesy of Elaine Mills

Granny's Girls gather annually to exchange stories. Front row (l to r): Donna Netherland and Betty Briscoe. Back row (l to r): Suzie Briscoe, Kathy Smith, Elaine Mills, Lauren Smith (holding Granny's photograph), Chris Bramuchi (holding son Charlie), Lisa Briscoe, Meg Hayes, and Nancy Jane Earnest.

me cut Betsy McCall paper dolls out of a magazine. She made clothes for me as well as for my dolls (hats included) and listened as I read her my poems. When I grew older, she made my best date dresses and sewed herself a beautiful suit for my wedding. She was not extraordinary — she was just Granny. I thought she would live forever.

When she arrived at her church that Sunday of her birthday week in 1978, her progeny spanned five generations. Staunchly Presbyterian, coifed and properly gloved, she was greeted by

She made clothes for me as well as for my dolls (hats included) and listened as I read her my poems. She was not extraordinary – she was just Granny. I thought she would live forever.

a congregation that inquired in clueless wonder how it felt to be 97 years old. With her usual level stare and steady voice, she quipped, "You really don't want to know."

Striding down the aisle to claim her familiar pew for the last time, she sang all the hymns by heart. Weeks later, she peacefully died, leaving her sewing machine newly idle, fabric scraps and button box shelved in the upstairs closet, and her understated feminism a strong, gleaming thread binding the generations of Perry women who would follow in her footsteps.

Each year, Mary Jackson Perry's female descendants, or "Granny's Girls" as we prefer to call ourselves, gather to share our family stories and to bond together in intergenerational love and respect. We are ever amazed at our own ability to withstand the rigors of modern life and the traumas that so often overtake others who lack a strong family support system.

Those of us who are older remember hot, sticky summer birthday celebrations in the backyard of the green house on Hattie Avenue. The younger ones must rely on our stories in order to realize their place in the ever-widening family circle.

As for me, I often wonder if my grandmother ever imagined the far-ranging influence she would have on those she loved. The things of hers I treasure — her lemon pie recipe, a crystal-tipped hat pin, the rusted button box, photographs — serve as daily reminders that her life was indeed an adventure and that fearlessness and determination are the hands that piece the quilt of a life worth living, a life that keeps on giving, generation after generation. N&T

Nancy Jane Earnest has finally found her own place in the world. She is an award-winning artist and poet and contributor to the Encyclopedia of Appalachia. *Her illustrations have graced many issues of* Now & Then *magazine.*

My daughter sits for the artist

reluctantly and only at my insistence.
The line is long for chalk portraiture,
the weather at the festival turning so warm
the children's elbows drip
rainbows from their melted snowcones.
Mothers shift sweaty toddlers hip to hip.

When it is her turn, the artist rubs
orange chalk over a white page, studies her face.
He traces eyebrows, outlines her eyes.
My grandmother peeks out at me.
He follows the line of her nose
and my mother's silhouette shadows the paper.

He sketches her mouth and reveals her sweet
grumpiness while she waits for him to finish.
His fingers brush her hairline
and my sister's forehead appears.
His knuckles shape her cheekbones.
My father laughs back.

Around the artist's tent the Cattlemen's grill
smokes, twisting with the sticky
smells of cotton candy and funnel cakes.
With short sweeps he smoothes the chalk
dusting away my relatives,
finally revealing one who is us all.

— Marianne Worthington

A native of Knoxville, Tenn., Marianne Worthington has been teaching communication studies at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky., since 1990. Her poems and essays have appeared in Appalachian Heritage, Arts Across Kentucky, Mossy Creek Reader, *and* Now & Then. *Worthington is reviews editor for* Now & Then.

Joseph Hall: The Man and His Work

by Michael Montgomery

For a Montana native, a summer job leads to a lifelong passion for Smoky Mountain people—their language and their culture.

Joseph Sargent Hall, a great collector of Appalachian cultural materials and student of the region, was in many ways an enigma.

Born in Montana in 1906, he spent nearly his entire career teaching at an obscure junior college in Los Angeles. By chance, he took a temporary job at the newly opened Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1937. His main intention was to earn money to pay graduate school expenses, but the short-term post led to a lifelong passion for documenting mountain language and lore.

A trained linguist, he never presented a paper at a professional conference on his main interest, Appalachian speech, nor did he ever attend a meeting of any kind on the region's culture. The little-known Cataloochee Press in Asheville, N.C., published three small books based on his research in the Smokies. Hall established Cataloochee Press himself in order to use the services of local printers to distribute his work.

When he died a decade ago, the only people in the Smokies who recalled him knew next to nothing about the man, yet he had made a detailed, permanent record of many of their parents and grandparents.

When he died a decade ago in Oceanside, Calif., the only people in the Smokies who recalled him knew next to nothing about the man, yet he had made a detailed, permanent record of many of their parents and grandparents. He had amassed one of the largest, most distinctive collections on Appalachia in existence, one that will be used by generations of scholars and lay people interested in the language, music, folk medicine, beliefs, and numerous other aspects of the culture of the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. Yet in his own lifetime, few in the field of Appalachian Studies knew his scholarship. What accounts for this man of contradictions?

A Fork in the Road

After a year at the Sorbonne in Paris in the mid-1930s, Hall entered the doctoral program in linguistics at Columbia University in New York City. Around the same time, officials at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park were completing land purchases for the park, which had been inaugurated in 1934.

These officials were debating what kind of park would be developed and what record, if any, should be made of the culture of several thousand people being removed from their properties. Some officials advocated maintaining mountain homesteads and

ETSU, Archives of Appalachia, Joseph Hall Collection

Joseph Hall (l) stands with Wilford Metcalf (c) and Herman Smith (r) at the Metcalf place in Del Rio, Tenn., in 1956.

their inhabitants, perhaps in a living history museum. They believed that an uninhabited landscape would present a false picture that denied that communities had thrived in the mountains for well over a century. Others thought that natural history should be the priority and sought to remove all traces of human habitation, converting the Smokies into a nature preserve like most previous national parks. Local business leaders hoped the park would feature major highways, hotels, and other commercial developments. Advocates within each camp could not agree among themselves.

To conduct a pilot study of the culture being displaced, the park decided to hire someone to begin collecting material, primarily on speech. Thus, in the spring of 1937, Roy Appleman, a historian with the National Park Service (NPS) in Washington, D.C., called his friend Joseph Hall in New York. Hall's three-month summer assignment was to document the language of older mountain residents who had leases that allowed them to remain after the government had purchased their land for the park. For Hall, who had been contemplating a study of the speech of Oklahoma for his doctoral research, the opportunity was to be a dramatic fork in his life's road.

The Fieldwork Begins

After arriving in the Smokies the following June, Hall quickly found himself at home. He was an avid outdoorsman, an early member of the Sierra Club, and a hiker of California's high Sierras and other rough terrain, so he reveled in being in this new mountain environment. But it was the people — open-hearted and unpretentious, dignified and independent, articulate though often unschooled — who most captured his attention.

In that first summer of fieldwork, he interviewed but did not record, concentrating on becoming familiar with mountain people and their land. He filled four notebooks with observations on expressions, pronunciations, and other details of speech. Because he was trained in the use of phonetic notation, he could rapidly

Fieldwork
by Joseph Hall

In the early days of his linguistic research in the late 1930s, Joseph Sargent Hall came to know people living in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina intimately as individuals quite different from the stereotypes found in the writing of so many others who had sojourned there, including former librarian Horace Kephart, whose 1913 book Our Southern Highlanders *Hall admired in many ways. At the end of his life, Hall reminisced in a 1991 letter to Michael Montgomery about those early months in the Smokies more than 50 years earlier.*

In my collecting from 1937 to 1941, I stayed at the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps, which provided good food and lodging and were sources of information as to the people roundabout to interview and record. Each camp had a superintendent in charge of the work of the CCC boys, an NPS [National Park Service] ranger, and a fireguard. Most of these personnel were formerly logging industry employees who knew their terrain well and the most likely informants. They usually had some unusual character in mind for me like Zilphie Sutton of Walnut Bottoms, Mrs. Clem Enloe of Tight Run Branch, and Jake Welch of Hazel Creek, beside all the other local folk. At each camp I would walk or hike to the homes of people or ride on a CCC truck going in that direction. Later the NPS gave me a pickup truck for this purpose and to carry the recording equipment

They also assigned a CCC enrollee to help with the driving, the equipment, and at times take part in the interview. As to lodging, I also lived for two or three weeks at the homes of several residents, like the Shultses of Emerts Cove, the Ramseys of Cosby, and the Leatherwood and Messer family at the White Oak (near Cataloochee). These good-hearted people were of course of enormous assistance as to the speech of the area and suggested important things to talk about. In addition to the interviews with people, there were my constant associations with friends I made along the way. … I lived in their homes, went to church with them (mostly Baptist, with one Primitive Baptist service). I worked in the fields at haying time, helped "wrap" tobacco, gathered and chipped wood for kitchen stoves, went hunting and fishing (with the Messer and Williams families of White Oak), attended special events like the Hall family reunion at Halls Top, North Carolina, enjoyed the festive fare amid formidable quantities of food, whole hams, pots of "roastin' ears," watermelons on ice in tubs, and so on. I attended the funeral of a close family kin [and] large reunions where whole communities had been displaced by the Park, always with dinner on the ground with loads of tempting food and with wonderful friends and kin to talk to.

The topics of the recordings were anything the informant wished to talk about. Men talked about their farm, their crops, their cattle, and hunting. Women liked to tell recipes or talk about their interest in weaving and quilting and the like. Sometimes a CCC foreman or ranger would suggest something like "Have Grady tell you how he trapped a groundhog in the Park nursery, how he had to trap twelve to catch the particular one that was eating the plants." There was general fun at such an incident. Or "have Mrs. Enloe tell about her fishing rights." When I met her at her house on Tight Run Branch, North Carolina, she asked, "Are you a little Park man or a big Park man?" Without an answer from me, she said, "Big Park man or little Park man, you son of a bitch, I fish when I please, winter or summer. See that can of worms?" (They were then verboten in the park.) She showered me with praise when I gave her a peace offering, a box of snuff, and let me take her picture. She then told how her brother fought in the war (the Civil War): "He was on the Rebel side, and I'm a Rebel yit!" I could usually get a rise out of people if I asked them how they liked the national park. Usual answers were like "It's the worst thing that ever ruint this country." One man of Hartford, Tennessee, said, "Before the park come in, I could shoot a rabbit or a possum whenever I wanted to. Now I don't stand no more show than a one-legged man at an ass-kicking!" But lest anyone assume these crudities were typical, let me assure you that most people were polite and cooperative and could see that the recordings were made for study and preservation as a historical record of aspects of Smokies life.

note many details of their language. Quickly he realized that a larger, more systematic study was called for, one that utilized the portable recording technology that was becoming available.

So in June 1939, Hall returned for nine months with equipment in hand. He completed 10 more notebooks and began recording in earnest, now with the intention of using the material for a doctoral dissertation on Smokies pronunciation. The park service and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) — a New Deal program that employed out-of-work young men in projects that conserved the country's natural resources — furnished all his equipment, transportation, and an assistant. They enabled him to find speakers throughout the Smokies — in Greenbrier Cove, Cades Cove, Cosby, Emerts Cove, Sugarlands, Hazel Creek, Cataloochee, Smokemont, and many other smaller, more remote communities.

Toward the late 1930s, the CCC had 22 camps in the Smokies and employed 4,000 men to clear land and build the roads, hiking trails, campgrounds, fire towers, and other infrastructure that converted half a million acres into a national park, in time the country's most popular. Using these camps as bases, Hall visited local people and recorded conversations, stories, music (traditional ballads, folk songs, hymns, and popular songs of the era), and square dances. At each camp, local men identified and often recommended "good talkers" who lived nearby. In his early work, he used two recorders: a Garwick that produced aluminum discs and was operated by cables hooked to a pickup truck battery and an Allied that made acetate discs and ran on a portable battery pack.

ETSU, Archives of Appalachia, Joseph Hall Collection

Mrs. Clem Enloe, Grandmother Enloe to her neighbors, allowed Joseph Hall to take her picture in 1937 for a peace offering of snuff. She claimed fishing rights in the park.

Warring Methodologies

The 20 hours of recordings Joseph Hall made between June 1939 and January 1940 stand as the first permanent record of Smokies speech and music, one of enormous historical significance. He interviewed several people born before the Civil War, the oldest in 1843, only a generation or so after communities were first founded in the Smokies. He returned to collect further material in the summers of 1940 and 1941 and in later years, he visited periodically until 1976 to take notes, make a few recordings, visit old friends, and attend reunions.

It was fortuitous that he made his early recordings when he did. World War II was looming, and the CCC, through which Hall had made indispensable local contacts, was soon to be phased out. It was disbanded for good in the summer of 1942. When he next returned to the Smokies in 1949, many of his speakers were dead.

Hall was an excellent listener and loved and accepted people without preconceptions, qualities easily detected by mountaineers who were well-known — a reputation that was often justified — for their wariness of outsiders. Because he came to idealize mountain people for their self-reliance and other qualities, romanticism did from time to time color Hall's writing. But he never lost scholarly perspective, discounting early in his work, for instance, the Elizabethan origin of mountain speech as an illusion. "Great Smokies speech is not Elizabethan English transplanted to America," he asserted.

His doctoral dissertation, based on his early collecting, was published as a monograph entitled *The Phonetics of Great Smoky Mountain Speech* by the American Dialect Society in 1942. Six decades later, it remains the fullest study of Smoky Mountain pronunciation. Yet within a year of publication, a review of it was to lead him never to publish technical work on Smokies speech again.

A highly unfavorable, indeed hostile, evaluation appeared in *Language,* the leading linguistics journal of the day. It was written by Raven I. McDavid Jr., a young scholar at Yale (the chief rival to Hall's alma mater, Columbia) who was a proponent of the "more scientific" and "more methodologically sound" linguistic atlas approach to research. That approach was based on the premise that the speech of individuals and regions could be compared only by asking a set list of specific questions everywhere. The reviewer had little sympathy for Hall's beguilingly simple, practical, and much less formal methodology: to ask broad, open-ended questions and let his speakers talk on any topic in which they had expertise or interest.

History has vindicated Hall's approach of eliciting lengthy, uninhibited responses (some accounts of bear hunting, for example, were 10 to 15 minutes long). It was far more suitable for collecting unself-conscious grammar and pronunciation. However, the attack caused Hall, an exceedingly modest man, to lose confidence in the value of his work for linguists.

Changing Focus

However, there was no diminishing Hall's enthusiasm for mountain life. When he returned to the Smokies after the war,

his fieldwork shifted largely to folklore. In the 1950s, he recorded former residents of the Smokies playing traditional music, telling folk tales, and discussing witchlore, folk medicine, ghosts, superstitions, and party games. He published short articles on these topics in folklore journals, but in all this work, his contact was with ordinary people, not with other scholars working in Appalachia.

Commissioned by the NPS to preserve the speech of a people being dispersed, Hall found a vigorous traditional culture that was changing but by no means disappearing. Because it defied his expectations in many ways, he became something of a missionary. Dismayed by negative images of mountain people that he found so often in the writings of others and by the picture of mountain society as "deprived," he was determined to show these people as they were, idiosyncrasies and all. The best, most respectful way to do this, he decided, was to have them present themselves.

So he compiled *Smoky Mountain Folks and Their Lore,* published in 1960, and the 1978 volume *Yarns and Tales from Old Smoky,* two small books of photographs and sketches of mountain natives telling anecdotes of mountain life, especially stories about hunting. All of these stories were woven together by an account of Hall's own fieldwork, mainly from pre-War days. A third volume, *Sayings from Old Smoky,* appeared in 1972 and was an extensive glossary of words, phrases, and proverbs excerpted from his recordings and notebooks.

A sampling of the fruits of Joseph Sargent Hall's linguistic fieldwork

Vocabulary

Yellow patch: a burned-over area grown up with thick brush.
Gritter: a grater for making grits.
Cat heads: biscuits.
Phthisic: asthma.
Tree in a clift: to drive an animal onto a cliff or into a hole in a cliff.
Protractive meetin': a series of revival services continued for a week or two.

Similes and Superlative Expressions

As drunk as a biled owl.
As happy as a dead pig in the sunshine.
As ugly as a mud fence daubed with tadpoles.
He would steal a chew of tobacco out of your mouth if you opened your mouth to yawn.
He ain't got the brains of a sap sucker.

Metaphorical Words and Phrases

Catty: active. "He's a catty old feller."
To founder: to eat too much. "Don't get foundered at that political barbecue" was said ironically in view of the small portions of food served.
To get the deadwood on someone: to learn something about someone which he doesn't want people to know. A man can be pretty nice if you "have the deadwood on him."
Popskull: rotgut whiskey.

From Smoky Mountain Folks and Their Lore *by Joseph S. Hall (Asheville, N.C.: The Cataloochee Press, 1960).*

Hall retired from teaching in 1972 and spent many of his final years organizing his Smoky Mountain material. He never relinquished the hope that it would someday interest language historians, folklorists, and other students of mountain life. He deposited copies of his recordings, unpublished manuscripts, and other archival material in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He also began work on a culminating expression of his devotion to the mountains and their people: an extensive glossary of Smokies speech based on his vast private collections spanning several decades.

A Legacy

In the mid-1980s, it was my privilege to begin corresponding with Hall and to visit him in California in 1990. Upon his death two years later, I inherited his library and collections. In accordance with Hall's wishes that they find a permanent home near the mountains he had come to love and that they be made available to future generations of researchers and college students, these materials have been deposited in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) to form a special collection in his name.

Hall also gave me custody of his glossary, which I have spent the past dozen years expanding to become a comprehensive work with the title *A Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English.* It is to be published in mid-2003 by the University of Tennessee Press. This volume and the Joseph Hall Collection at ETSU will secure Hall's legacy as a premier scholar of traditional Southern Appalachian life.

The field of Appalachian Studies has known a handful of individuals whose work commands pre-eminent recognition for documenting the region's culture. Among these, Joseph Sargent Hall is surely one. N&T

This article was adapted from "The Contributions of Joseph Sargent Hall to Appalachian Studies" by Michael Montgomery in the 1994 issue of the Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association.

Michael Montgomery is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, where he taught linguistics for nearly 20 years. His Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English *is in press from the University of Tennessee Press, and he is working on other books about the Scotch-Irish heritage of American English and on Appalachian English grammar.*

The Joseph Sargent Hall Collection at the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University consists of the linguist's field recordings, field notes, indices, photographs, and typescripts focusing on the language and folklore of the Great Smoky Mountains. Researchers may access these materials by visiting the archives, located on the fourth floor of the Sherrod Library, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, with the exception of university holidays. A descriptive finding aid for the collection is scheduled to be posted on the web (http://cass.etsu.edu/archives) in the spring of 2003.

Other materials associated with Joseph Hall, including his earliest recordings, can be found in the Library & Archives Collections at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Gatlinburg, Tenn. Access is provided only by appointment. To make arrangements, phone (865) 436-1296.

A Strong and Lonely Voice

by Jim Clark

A writer stumbles across a relatively unknown North Georgia poet, who quickly joins the eclectic ranks of his literary heroes.

I first heard of Byron Herbert Reece quite by accident. I was teaching at the University of Georgia (UGA) at Athens in the early 1990s, and I spent a lot of my free time driving north and roaming the hills and hollers of the North Georgia Mountains. Quaint little towns like Dahlonega, Blairsville, Helen, and Toccoa exerted a powerful attraction on me. This was even more true of state parks like Unicoi, Amicalola Falls, Black Rock Mountain, and Moccasin Creek, with their miles of steep trails and breathtaking gorges and waterfalls.

Perhaps because of my childhood in the Tennessee foothills of the Smoky Mountains, one of the things I have made a point of doing in every state in which I've lived is to seek out the state's highest elevation. So I came to know and love the vista from the observation tower on top of Brasstown Bald in Northern Georgia and the breathless, shivery exultation I felt after climbing the trail to reach that prominence. Though I didn't know the poem at the time, these lines from Reece's "Roads" capture perfectly that feeling:

> Therefore whatever roads repair
> To cities on the plain, my own
> Lead upward to the peaks; and there
> I feel, pushing my ribs apart,
> The wide sky entering my heart.

North of Brasstown Bald, off Highway 76, lies the little Georgia town of Hiawassee, just south of the North Carolina border. There, on the banks of Lake Chatuge, is a campground I used to frequent, and just up the road is the site of the Georgia Mountain Fair. Sometime in the summer of 1992 while camping there, I saw signs advertising *The Reach of Song,* Georgia's state historical drama, which was being performed at that time in the big warehouse-like theater of the Georgia Mountain Fair.

It seemed like a pleasant way to spend an evening, and so I went. Written by Tom DeTitta, the play encompasses three decades around the time of World War II when the modern world came careening precipitously up the mountain back roads to knock at lonely cabins and offer its alluring, ambiguous promise. A character based on Byron Herbert Reece narrates the drama, and his poetry is woven into it.

Though people have mixed opinions as to the merits of the play, having seen several other such state historical dramas, I am of the opinion that *The Reach of Song* is clearly a cut above most. At any rate, the character of the narrator of the play resonated

> The more I read by Reece, the more impressed I was.

with me strongly, and lines of Reece's poetry haunted me. I determined to find out more about this "mountain farmer/poet."

A Biographical Sketch

Finding out more about Reece was fairly easy because, as it turned out, the head of my department at UGA, Hugh Ruppersburg, was fast becoming something of an authority on Reece. He was in the process of editing *Georgia Voices,* a three-volume anthology of Georgia literature, a project finally completed in the spring of 2000.

Among other things, I learned that Reece was born in 1917 in a cabin on a small farm near Choestoe in Union County, Georgia, not far from the Tennessee line. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, he published four volumes of poems and two novels, all with E.P. Dutton and all receiving generally favorable reviews.

By the mid-1930s, his mother and father had contracted tuberculosis, and Reece faithfully tended the family's mountain farm, even while accepting visiting writing positions at the University

of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Emory University in Atlanta, and the University of Georgia in Athens. He eventually contracted the disease that killed both his parents. Depressed by his deteriorating health and the prospect of hospitalization and dependency, he took his own life on June 3, 1958, in his quarters on the campus of Young Harris College in Northern Georgia, where he was teaching at the time. He was 40 years old.

Literature and the Land

The more I read by Reece, the more impressed I was. Here was a genuine rural mountain farmer who, despite his difficult and rather circumscribed life, was also a genuine literary artist of considerable merit and who had, at least during his lifetime, a considerable national reputation. For example, he won *American Poet* magazine's annual poetry award in 1943, and his poetry collection, *Bow Down in Jericho,* received a Pulitzer nomination in 1950.

Reece was a compelling figure to me because of my own background and interests. I grew up on a small farm in the Upper Cumberland area of Middle Tennessee; my father was a county agent for the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service, and my mother was a high school teacher. I graduated from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., where many of my professors were students and friends of the members of the Fugitives and Agrarians. These were poets and writers — such as Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and John Crowe Ransom — who gained international fame there in the 1920s and 1930s for their writing and their scathing critique of the modern industrial mindset. Literature and the land had always been strongly connected in my mind, and Reece was a perfect example of that connection.

Two Farmer Poets

Whenever I encounter a new artist for the first time — whether literary, musical, or visual — my first impulse is to compare him or her to similar artists with whom I am already familiar. When I first encountered the poems of Byron Herbert Reece, three artists immediately came to mind: Wendell Berry, James Agee, and Townes Van Zandt.

Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library/University of Georgia Libraries

A genuine mountain farmer, Byron Herbert Reece also was a literary artist of considerable merit with a national reputation during his lifetime. Like other literary figures who had gained prominence in the 1920s and 1930s as members of the Fugitives and Agrarians, Reece was an example of the strong connection between literature and the land.

Kentucky native Berry's relevance, as a well-known modern day "farmer/poet," is perhaps the most obvious. Berry is one of my three or four favorite contemporary writers and a fine example of someone who truly practices what he preaches. In his essays, fiction, and poetry, he encourages people to "stay home," as one of his poems puts it, participate in the life of the community, and practice proper stewardship of the land and other natural resources. Berry has lived, with his wife Tanya, for many years on their small farm in Kentucky, which they farm by horse power.

And yet, for all my considerable admiration of Berry, his portraits of farm life sometimes seem a little studied or mannered. The picture in the novel *The Memory of Old Jack,* for example, or the portrait of Elton Penn in the short story "A Friend of Mine" in *Two More Stories of the Port William Membership,* seem maybe a little too sweet and pretty, with too little acknowledgment of the sour and the ugly. Even as I write this it occurs to me that Berry is too good a writer and observer of human nature to pen a book that is anything less than complex and mixed, as human nature is, but I am speaking here of a general tendency in his fiction toward a studied optimism and a confidence in the ultimate working out of things for the good.

> LITERATURE AND THE LAND HAD ALWAYS BEEN STRONGLY CONNECTED IN MY MIND, AND REECE WAS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THAT CONNECTION.

Reece, on the other hand, seemed to *wrestle* with the physical demands and aggravations of farm life, especially as they tended to eat into the precious time and energy (energy that was in increasingly short supply as his tuberculosis progressed) he tried to reserve for his writing. He himself observed to his editor at E.P. Dutton, Elliott Graham, that farming and writing both "make too many demands on your energy and time."

Nor was he, I think, a farmer by natural inclination but more by fate and circumstance. A reader feels this sense of frustration and disquiet in lines like these from "The Travelers":

> It was not yesterday time taught,
> By keeping me to fields confined,
> How there may be escape in thought.

And in "The Stay-at-Home," the poem's speaker stoically and somewhat fatalistically takes his place

> … with other men
> Like him in bone and blood,
> Who often thought of going
> But had the will to stay
> And turn them to their hoeing
> When cocks crew up the day.

This despite the fact that

> The sounds he most regarded
> Were all of passing things:
> Swift waters flowing,
> Winds to westward blowing,
> Footsteps outward going
> And wild, wandering wings.

Reece's two novels — *Better a Dinner of Herbs* and, in particular, *The Hawk and the Sun* — also offer grimly poetic naturalistic critiques of their rural communities, as opposed to Berry's still-evolving depiction of the relatively healthy, sane, and decent fictional community of Port William. *The Hawk and the Sun,* for example, tells the story of the brutal mob lynching of a presumably innocent crippled black man and the "good people's" hypocrisy, cowardice, and general ineffectuality. Hugh Ruppersburg, in his foreword to the University of Georgia Press reprint of *The Hawk and the Sun,* describes Reece as "a stern and severe moralist who understood his region and his kind more deeply than we could ever suspect or want." Nevertheless, both Berry and Reece seem to be authentic farmer/poets who even use the same metaphor, namely "marriage," to describe their relationship to the land.

Basking in a Cruel Radiance

To some people, comparing Reece to James Agee may seem strange at first. After all, though Agee was born in Knoxville, Tenn., and though his relations were mostly rural farm people, he was educated at prestigious prep schools and ultimately went to Harvard University. Add to this the fact that he lived most of his decidedly bohemian adult life in the urban Northeast, writing for magazines such as *Time, Life, Fortune,* and *The Nation,* and the comparison begins to seem unlikely indeed.

It is Agee's writing — in particular, his nonfiction masterpiece about the lives of tenant farmers in Alabama during the Depression, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* — that makes him a useful and enlightening comparison to Reece.

One passion that Reece and Agee shared was photography, and each man's similar comments regarding the relatively new art form reveal much about his aesthetic and artistic inclinations. In a letter to E.V. Griffith, a younger writer with whom he often corresponded, Reece, after his return to Choestoe from his stint as poet-in-residence at UCLA, comments on the fall color in the mountains. "The world here is so astonishingly beautiful one can hardly bear to look at it. … I have been taking a few

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color photos on Kodachrome," he reports. "I can't afford to shoot too many, but it is a great temptation to wreck my bank account, which wouldn't take much doing, and record some of the beauty of the countryside."

In another letter to Griffith a few years later, Reece describes this almost visionary moment: "The other day I drove about half way down Georgia, and suddenly I saw a filling station isolated

in sharp light against the hills, and for a moment it was as beautiful as anything I ever saw and absolutely timeless. I don't know what it meant. I know it hurt me and I was grateful for the hurt because it was proof that I am alive."

I mention these two passages to point up the similar aesthetic and artistic vision held by both Reece and Agee. In his astonishing "Preamble" to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* Agee writes, "For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it, and centrally and simply, without either dissection into science, or digestion into art, but with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive it as it

TO SOME PEOPLE, COMPARING REECE TO JAMES AGEE MAY SEEM STRANGE AT FIRST.

stands: so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is. That is why," he concludes, "the camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time." As literary artists, both Reece and Agee strove to capture in words "the cruel radiance of what is."

Lovers of Music

Near the end of his "Preamble," Agee writes similarly of music. He advises his reader to get a phonograph or radio "capable of the most extreme loudness possible" and listen to Beethoven or Schubert. "Turn it on as loud as you can get it," Agee instructs, and put the speakers as closely to your ears as possible, focusing exclusively on what you hear. "You won't hear it nicely," he says. "If it hurts you, be glad of it." What you hear, says Agee, "is beyond any calculation savage and dangerous and murderous to all equilibrium in human life as human life is; nothing can equal the rape it does on all that death; nothing except anything, anything in existence or dream, perceived anywhere remotely toward its true dimension."

Reece was clearly a lover of music as well. The oft-repeated story of the discovery of his suicide includes the detail of a phonograph in his quarters at Young Harris College playing Mozart's *Piano Sonata in D.* Several of Reece's Christmas lyrics, including "If I Had a Little Coat," were set to music by Kenneth Walton and published by Boosey and Hawkes. Additionally, the poet mentions in a letter to William Tate, dean of students at the University of Georgia, that John Vincent, director of UCLA's department of music, had asked him to write a libretto for an opera based on the old folk song "The Ballad of Little Mattie Groves."

Sharing a Dark Fatalism

My most immediate musical connection to Reece's poems, however, was the late Texas troubadour Townes Van Zandt, whom many referred to as the unofficial poet laureate of the state of Texas. Like Reece, Van Zandt's forte was dark, fatalistic narratives, many in traditional ballad form, occasionally offset by glimmerings of sun-dappled lyricism. Having discovered Reece, how could I possibly listen to these opening words of Van Zandt's bleak "Lungs" and fail to think of the stoic, tubercular mountain poet who wrote poems such as "Query in This Year of Our Lord," "Whose Eye Is on the Sparrow," and "As I Lay Easy on my Bed"?

> Well won't you lend your lungs to me?
> Mine are collapsing.
> Plant my feet and bitterly breathe
> Up the time that's passing.
> Breath I'll take and breath I'll give
> And pray the day ain't poison.
> Stand among the ones that live
> In lonely indecision.

The same dark fatalism of these lines can be seen in the charged question, at once personal and historical, that ends Reece's "Query in This Year of Our Lord":

> Shall the mind in its twenty-fifth year
> Under its raven hair
> Begin so soon to despair,
> Surrender so soon to fear
> In this blind and bloody year?

Much as the speaker in "Lungs" inescapably recognizes himself in "the ones that live/In lonely indecision," so does Reece's speaker in "As I Lay Easy on My Bed" finally admit his kinship with "the young man," "the strong man," and "the old man" who all succumb to "vacancy":

> As I lay sleeping on my bed
> They made their peace with me,
> A silent pact with nothing said;
> And I my trinity
> Slept in vacancy.

Though Van Zandt's mountains are more often than not those of Colorado and New Mexico, he maintained a cabin in Tennessee where he spent much of his time when not on the road. A song like "Tecumseh Valley," with its lovely, tragic heroine, definitely seems set in the Southern Appalachian mountains, with lines like "The name she gave was Caroline,/ Daughter of a miner," and the whole second verse:

> She came from Spencer,
> Across the hill.
> She said her Pa had sent her.
> Because the coal was low
> And soon the snow
> Would turn the skies to winter.

"Tecumseh Valley" has many notable affinities with poems of Reece's, such as "Ballad of the Weaver," "Bitter Berry," "I Know a Valley Green with Corn," and "The Elm and the Moon." In each of these poems, there is a tragic young woman who must deal with difficult questions and circumstances. In some of them, as in Van Zandt's "Tecumseh Valley," she does not survive the ordeal. In "The Elm and the Moon," for example, the young girl, who is "thinking about her lover," finds herself in this life-and-death quandary:

Love is given me but to grieve me,
What I have given's no more to give;
Because I have given it he will leave me,
Because he will leave me I cannot live.

Ultimately, she trades her "gift of grace" for "the garb of her who dressed in gray goes/Soberly down to a house of dust." In "Tecumseh Valley," the heroine, Caroline, "saved enough to get back home," only to discover that "her dreams were denied/Her Pa had died," and in numb despair "she turned to whoring out on the streets," and she takes her own life.

Finally, there is Van Zandt's eerie song of supernatural love and revenge, "Our Mother the Mountain," which begins promisingly enough with "My lover comes to me with a rose on her bosom/The moon's dancing purple/All through her black hair," but quickly devolves into a nightmare in which "I reach for her hand and her eyes turn to poison/And her hair turns to splinters/And her flesh to brine." This song couples the mountain ballad's "jealous lover" theme, embodied in poems of Reece's such as "Lest the Lonesome Bird" and "The Fable in the Blood," with the supernatural, as in such poems as "The Betrothed from the Grave" and "I'll Do as Much for My True-Love." As is more common in "jealous lover" ballads, both "Lest the Lonesome Bird" and "The Fable in the Blood" feature a man who becomes jealous of his lover and takes her life, unlike Van Zandt's "Our Mother the Mountain," where the jealous lover is female. The supernatural element in Reece's "The Betrothed from the Grave" is the fact that Sweet William, "a livid ghost/New-come from graveyard ground," visits his grieving lover, Margaret, to entreat her to

"Forbid, my dear, the ready tear,
Let not thy grief down flood,
For when you weep my coffin deep
Is filled with lappered blood."

Sweet William, though a ghost, is a "sprite of health," come to soothe Margaret, and help ease her grief. The lover in Van Zandt's song, on the other hand, is truly a "demon lover" who curses the song's protagonist: "[She] screams that my first-born/Will surely be blind."

ANOTHER ELEMENT THAT NO DOUBT CONTRIBUTES TO MY PERCEPTION OF SIMILARITIES BETWEEN REECE, AGEE, AND VAN ZANDT IS MY SENSE THAT EACH MAN WAS, TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER, A "DOOMED ROMANTIC."

Doomed Romantics

Another element that no doubt contributes to my perception of similarities between Reece, Agee, and Van Zandt is my sense that each man was, to one degree or another, a "doomed romantic." All led relatively short, intense, creative lives, and while Reece took his own life, all led lives that hastened their own demises, with alcohol, tobacco, and other vices figuring prominently. Each man marched to a different drummer and detested falseness and compromise. Physically, even, Reece, Agee, and Van Zandt seem to fit the romantic stereotype, as each could be characterized as dark and brooding. It would be interesting to know what Wendell Berry would make of these men and their complex, flawed lives and art.

Perhaps it may seem to some that I have not focused sufficiently on Byron Herbert Reece and his writing. I wouldn't necessarily deny it. What I have tried to do is tell of my own discovery of Reece and, I hope, illuminate Reece's life and work by means of these comparisons and contrasts.

Berry, Agee, and Van Zandt are all real heroes of mine whom I hold in the highest regard. All three are serious, committed craftsmen, with immense natural talent, who articulated a coherent aesthetic philosophy and remained true to it. And my point is that Byron Herbert Reece, their Appalachian brother, sits comfortably among them. N&T

A native of Byrdstown, Tenn., Jim Clark recently edited Fable in the Blood: The Selected Poems of Byron Herbert Reece. *In addition, he has published two books of poems:* Dancing on Canaan's Ruins *and* Handiwork. *He lives in Wilson, N.C., where he is writer-in-residence at Barton College, director of the Barton College Creative Writing Symposium, and an editor of the literary journal,* Crucible.

A Fire of Boughs

At onset of December
When the cold comes to stay
I bring boughs, leafed in May,
To feed the cheerful ember
And warm the wintry night.
Folded into his fur,
The cat disdains to stir
But dreams by firelight.
And I should follow suit
Except that boughs in turning
Shapeless in the burning
Alarms the more than brute
Caged within my being
That often plays at blind
But stirs and shakes my mind
With grave misgiving, seeing
Wood fall from coal to ash,
Its substance burned to nothing,
Its luminescent clothing,
Its shine, its flash,
Expended, one with the night—
And is not comforted
That such translation shed
Both warmth and light.

—Byron Herbert Reece

from The Season of Flesh, *1955; reprinted in* Fable in the Blood: The Selected Poems of Byron Herbert Reece, *2002*

Remembering the Lives of Lynchburg, Virginia's 19th-Century African Americans

by Melinda Wheeler

A Virginia cemetery yields up the secrets of an earlier era.

Among the antique roses, some of the grave markers in this old Southern cemetery in Lynchburg, Va., are elegantly carved, and some are small, faded, and crooked. But each represents a unique life story.

Many of those life stories belong to 19th-century free African Americans. What many citizens and visitors don't realize is that even before the Civil War, Lynchburg — a Central Virginia city founded in 1786 and located on the James River in the foothills of the Blue Ridge — had a community of free blacks who contributed much to its daily life and culture.

There was schoolteacher Amelia Pride, for example, and Blind Billy, a talented musician. Such figures from Lynchburg's antebellum past were among the fascinating characters who lived in the city in those days and who are buried in what today is called the Old City Cemetery.

The Old City Cemetery staff is now chronicling the lives of these and many other free blacks. According to the cemetery's young curator and archivist, Ted Delaney, free blacks as a group had been almost invisible in Lynchburg histories prior to the staff's research. "We do a lot of black history here," he adds, "because nine out of 10 free blacks from the area during the 19th century are buried here. It was the only cemetery in Lynchburg available to them in their lifetimes."

Relatively Free Blacks

Delaney has co-authored a book with Phillip Wayne Rhodes, director of Lynchburg's Jones Memorial Library. The book, published by the Southern Memorial Association, is *Free Blacks of Lynchburg, Virginia, 1805-1865.* It is about blacks who were free before the end of the Civil War and is the product of the research both men have done, including Rhodes' work with court records and information gathered by Delaney in his daily research. The book lists the free black families buried in the cemetery and the court records that contain, among other documents, the deeds of emancipation of slaves. Says Delaney, "In 1860, about one out of every eight blacks in Lynchburg was free."

Eventually, though, Delaney goes on to explain, a 1793 law declared that all free blacks had to register with the "Hustings" Court of Lynchburg, or what would be known today as a Circuit Court. "By law they were not equivalent to free whites and were considered a degraded class by many whites," he comments.

Melinda Wheeler

Because of its prominent location, the grave marker of Agnes Langley is draped in the Victorian manner.

Delaney also states that in 1806, all emancipated slaves had to leave the state of Virginia within 12 months or return to slavery. This removal law applied only to slaves who were emancipated after 1806. Those emancipated before that year and their descendents could remain in the Old Dominion.

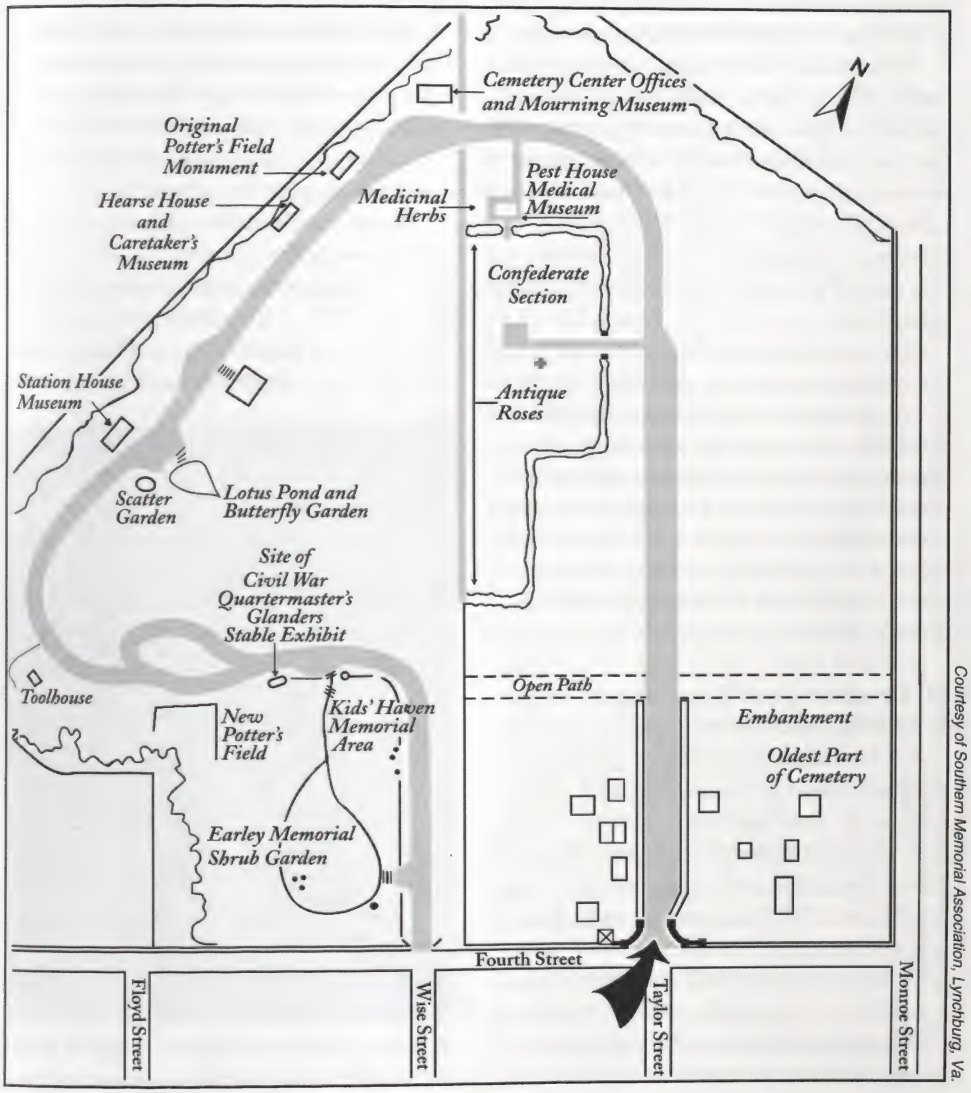
For the most part, this law was enforced from 1806 until 1865, but Delaney adds, "There was probably some lack of enforcement because if an emancipated slave was thought to be useful, he might be allowed to stay." He adds that the law was created because lawmakers of the day were opposed to freeing African Americans and wanted to pressure slave owners into not emancipating their slaves because the legislators considered free blacks a burden on the community.

Rhodes further indicates the discrimination that existed in this period when he comments on the ways in which blacks then traced their roots. "Every man and woman traced ancestry through the mother. Otherwise, they would have to find their fathers." That, of course, would have been difficult because in many instances white slave owners fathered free blacks, and this was generally kept out of official records.

"We do a lot of black history here because nine out of 10 free blacks from the area during the 19th century are buried here. It was the only cemetery in Lynchburg available to them in their lifetimes."

The Work Begins

Established in 1806, a year after the city was incorporated, the Lynchburg Old City Cemetery is the oldest public burial ground in continuous use in Virginia.



Courtesy of Southern Memorial Association, Lynchburg, Va.

A map of Lynchburg, Va.'s Old City Cemetery

Consequently, there is so much history to be learned there that sometimes it is hard to know where to start. Jane White, formerly the cemetery's restoration chairperson and now the director, has given many years to preserving the wealth of information the graveyard provides. White had never set foot in the cemetery until about 1980 (no one is sure of the exact year) when she and three other ladies were asked to become members of the Southern Memorial Association (SMA) by its elderly outgoing officers. The SMA, founded in 1866, had as its original mission the care of the Confederate section of the cemetery. Based in Lynchburg, the SMA is a completely independent entity, even though it is very similar to hundreds of other Confederate memorial associations women organized all across the South during Reconstruction.

White is a garden designer by training. Before she began her restoration work on the part of the Old City Cemetery outside of the Confederate section in 1993, she was well-known in Lynchburg for her restoration of the garden behind the home of the African American poet Anne Spencer, who lived on Pierce Street. Spencer, who was born in 1882 and died in 1975, was a famous poet of the Harlem Renaissance, which peaked in the 1920s.

As time passed, White realized that it was not only the Confederate section that needed care. After a 1993 storm left much of the cemetery badly in need of repair, "we've been focused on caring for the entire cemetery, including the African American graves," she reports.

The SMA now provides funding for cemetery tours, museum contents, a web site, and volunteer programs. The City of Lynchburg pays for staff salaries. The restoration project has been an extensive undertaking that has helped preserve such historical cemetery sites as the Pest House Medical Museum, an 1840s medical building containing a surgery and medical instruments of the time. It has also resulted in a combination Mourning Museum and Cemetery office, which has

Courtesy of Southern Memorial Association, Lynchburg, Va.

Amelia Elizabeth Pride, the daughter of free blacks, became a teacher and eventually a principal at a Lynchburg public elementary school in the late 1800s.

photographs and artifacts related to mourning customs in Victorian Lynchburg and elsewhere.

White led this restoration effort and was responsible for assembling the staff that now works with her. She needed people from various fields. In addition to an administrative assistant and two groundskeepers, she also created Delaney's job.

Delaney, who grew up in Lynchburg, has a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. As an undergraduate, he wrote a general comprehensive history of the cemetery as part of his course work over four semesters. In addition, he volunteered at the cemetery. He has now been working there full-time since 2000.

It is his job to piece together the facts of lives long over to help identify those buried there. In the whole cemetery today, there are approximately 4,000 grave markers. Of the approximately 20,000 people buried at the cemetery since 1806, records exist for only about 5,000 of them. Delaney is researching all of this in addition to helping individuals doing genealogical research on family members. He agrees with White that it is a never-ending task.

The Cemetery

The Old City Cemetery covers 26 acres. It consists of several potter's fields, the Confederate section, and the largest section, a burial ground where many prominent African Americans are buried. These older sections, surrounded by a brick wall, are now closed to further burials, but there are two new sections. One is another potter's field, where indigents are buried. A group called the "overseers of the poor" looked after indigent burials in the 19th century; the Department of Human Services handles that task today. When searching for information on indigent burials, Delaney is able to make use of the informative records left by the overseers. Once he has a name gleaned from the overseers' records, he then looks through obituaries, census records, and marriage certificates to put together a history of the person's life.

The other new section is one for nonindigents. However, in this new nonindigent section, there are tight restrictions on who can be buried there: Only if you have a family member buried within the brick walled area, the oldest part, can you be buried outside in the newer area.

There is also an area of the graveyard called "Negro Row," thought to be part of the Confederate section. It is presumed that most of those buried in Negro Row were slaves who worked for local hospitals, taking care of Civil War soldiers. However, complete information about this part of the burial ground has yet to be compiled.

"Three-quarters of the people buried in the entire cemetery are African American. It is a predominantly black cemetery," Delaney comments. He goes on to say that the cemetery is a kind of patchwork quilt of discrete units with some black and some white areas. Until 1965, it was considered a segregated cemetery, and the older closed areas are now segregated by default. The two new areas are not.

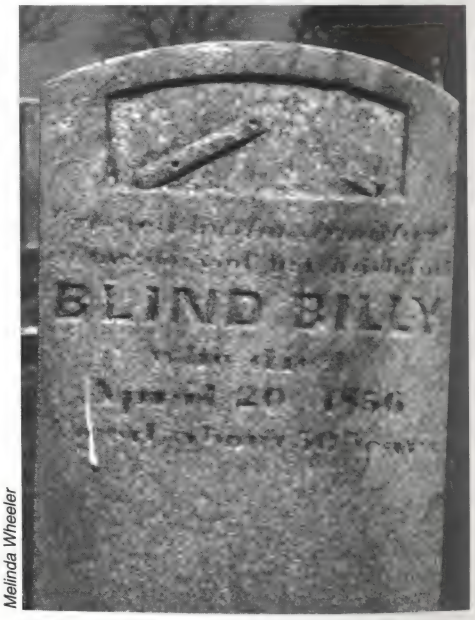
A Dedicated Educator and a Beloved Musician

Of the many illustrious free black people buried in Lynchburg's Old City Cemetery, Amelia Elizabeth Pride, who lived from 1857 to 1932, is one of the best known. She was the daughter of free blacks, an 1879 Hampton Institute graduate, and an early schoolteacher for what was then known as the Polk Street Colored School. It was part of the Lynchburg public school system and today would be designated an elementary school. She became the school's principal in 1881 and held that position for 20 of the 33 years she worked there. A dedicated educator, she started a cooking school in Lynchburg and later helped to have home economics included as a subject in the public schools.

Delaney expands our knowledge of Pride's accomplishments in the Spring/Summer 2001 issue of *Lynch's Ferry* magazine, a publication of the Lynchburg Historic Foundation. In "Industry, Economy, and Pride: The Life and Work of Amelia Perry Pride," he mentions that the Lynchburg city schools honored her in 1949 by naming the new home economics building at Dunbar High School (now the Dunbar Middle School) after her. Called the Amelia Pride Center, it survives today as a center for alternative education.

Interestingly, Delaney points out in the same article that Amelia Pride always maintained she was the great-granddaughter of President Thomas Jefferson. She believed that Jefferson had a mulatto daughter, and that her father, William Perry, was the son of this daughter and a man named John Perry. However, Delaney states that scholarship has not turned up any conclusive documentary evidence supporting her claim.

Another memorable person who was laid to rest in the cemetery is Blind Billy the musician, who was born in 1805 and died in 1855. A fife player, he played his music for various events, such as parades and parties. A nonattributed quote fre-



Melinda Wheeler

When much-loved musician Blind Billy died in 1855 (not 1856 as carved on the stone), he was free, courtesy of his fans.

Melinda Wheeler

Lynchburg, Va.'s Old City Cemetery staff members Ted Delaney (l) and Jane White (c) get ready to give a walking tour with help from Phillip Wayne Rhodes (r), director of the Jones Memorial Library.

quently cited in cemetery publications says of him: "He could render his notes as sharp as would make a soldier do or die … or so soft and sweet as to induce the coyest maiden to surrender at discretion." The figure of a fife snapped in two is carved on his gravestone. He died a free man, after the citizens who so loved his music bought him his freedom.

Born a Slave, Died a College President

The life story of Professor Frank Trigg is one of the most interesting of all those buried in the Old City Cemetery. Born in 1850, he was not technically a free antebellum black: His emancipation did not come until the end of the Civil War in 1865 when Lincoln's Proclamation finally took effect throughout the South.

He "came into the world a slave and was buried a retired college president," noted White in her Spring/Summer 2000 *Lynch's Ferry* article, "Lynchburg's Professor Frank Trigg: From Slave to College President." In this article, she discusses how he was born in the governor's mansion in Richmond where his parents, Frank Sr. and Sarah Ann, were slaves of Gov. John B. Floyd. Having become the property of Floyd's son-in-law, a Mr. Hughes, after Floyd's death in 1863, Trigg lost one of his arms in a work accident on the Hughes farm. Hughes then told him "since you are no more good with your hands, we will see how good you can be with your head." Thus Trigg entered the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Va., in 1870—a year ahead of prominent African American leader and educator Booker T. Washington—and graduated in 1873. Trigg and Washington eventually became good friends.

Trigg married Ellen Preston Taylor in 1879 and moved to Lynchburg in 1880. He worked as a teacher in Lynchburg for 22 years, ultimately becoming a high school principal. He was also the first African American supervisor of black students in the Lynchburg school system. In 1902, he became the principal of Princess Anne Academy, an institution founded in Princess Anne, Md., in 1886 as the Delaware Conference Academy for Negroes, now known as the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Trigg Hall, the university's main agricultural science building, is named after him. In 1907, Trigg bought a 110-acre farm near Lynchburg in Amherst County. In 1916, he became president of Bennett College, a Greensboro, N.C., black women's college. After retiring in Lynchburg, he died in 1933 at the age of 83.

Successful But Not Exactly Reputable

There are also some quite colorful histories associated with the cemetery, such as that of Agnes Langley, born in 1792, and her daughter Elizabeth, born in 1828. The mother and daughter ran a brothel (politely called a "sporting house" in cemetery publications) on Commerce Street in downtown Lynchburg during the 19th century. The existence of the Langley brothel is documented by deeds located in city records.

Prostitution, says Delaney, was the single most lucrative occupation for free blacks in Lynchburg during the period. According to Delaney and Rhodes, Elizabeth Langley was a free woman of mixed blood, who was classified as white after two white people testified to that effect. As a result, the court issued her a certificate affirming that she was "not a negro," as was the custom of the times. According to personal property tax records of the time, the Langleys owned a piano, worth $250, as well as gold and silver jewelry. Elizabeth Langley's estate was estimated by the 1860 census at $5,000, a great sum in those days.

Because of its style and prominent location along the cemetery driveway, the Langleys' grave marker has been draped with a long black scarf, part of the Victorian mourning customs of the period. "A lot of people ask if we drape the Langleys' monument to stigmatize them, as if we're putting a 'scarlet letter' on their graves," Delaney admits. "But we do not mean to isolate or stigmatize the Langley prostitutes, as their monument is one of

Courtesy of Southern Memorial Association, Lynchburg, Va.

Not emancipated until the end of the Civil War, Frank Trigg became a teacher, high school principal, and, eventually, president of Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C.

several draped with black crepe. All the others whose monuments are similarly decorated were not prostitutes."

Difficult Times

It was not easy being a free black person during the lifetimes of these people. Delaney and Rhodes show the contradictory position occupied by free blacks in society: They were neither slaves nor were they truly free in the same way whites were. "They were a living controversy for the white community here," says Delaney.

Relatively wealthy and accomplished free blacks — Amelia Pride, for example — represented only a percentage of the free African Americans who lived back then. Most free blacks were impoverished and uneducated, and often the white population considered them troublemakers who contributed nothing to society. In their book, Rhodes and Delaney state, "White Lynchburgers publicly expressed contempt for local free blacks as early as the 1820s." They go on to quote an anonymous letter to the editor of the local paper, the *Lynchburg Virginian,* as calling free blacks "worse than dead weight," "indolent," and "vicious." In addition, they quote from a letter to Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, during the Civil War, in which a Lynchburg mechanic, John Lenahan, calls local free black tradesmen "worse than useless."

Delaney adds that some prominent free blacks also disliked impoverished free blacks. "Elite and working-class free blacks surely felt ambivalent towards them — on the one hand sympathizing with them because they shared a common legal, social, and economic status, and on the other distancing themselves because the shortcomings of a few poor free blacks discredited all free people of color. In other words, the stereotype of free blacks as idle and 'addicted to vice' hurt the many free people of color who were industrious and virtuous."

Delaney and Rhodes also document the fact that many free blacks had to petition the state for permission to live in the commonwealth once they were freed. Pleasant Roane, a free black carpenter from nearby Campbell County, made such a petition in 1826. It succeeded because of the nine testimonials of "respectable white men," who made statements such as "I know of no colored man more deserving a residence in this state."

Reconnecting to the Past

Still, thanks to people like Delaney, Rhodes, and White, there is now an important and growing body of knowledge about the contributions made by free blacks and their descendents in Lynchburg. Because of this, more and more people, both black and white, are going on cemetery walking tours, asking about family genealogy, and feeling a sense of pride in their ancestry.

Delaney sums it up well. "The strength of a community is in its diversity. These were people who could have picked up and moved North," he points out. A society needs people with an array of talents to truly function as a well-balanced whole, and Lynchburg's free blacks showed a wide range of skills and interests. They included not only college presidents, teachers, and musicians but also cooks, carpenters, ministers, midwives, pharmacists, and undertakers. Though some made more lasting contributions than others to the life of the community, each helped Lynchburg to be a fully developed town.

"They stayed here and put up with the discrimination and worked to make Lynchburg a better place," notes Delaney. "By leading exemplary lives, they proved how wrong those who saw free blacks as a liability to the community were. I think it is very admirable that they stayed."

As we continue to learn about these people, who have been left out of Lynchburg's written historical past for so long, we see how much they are a part of us and how their accomplishments still touch our lives today. N&T

Melinda Wheeler lives in Lynchburg, Va., and teaches English as a Second Language to Mexican migrant children in Nelson County, Va. She also does freelance writing and photography.

Cemetery Maples

Februarys Earl strings sap lines
bluer than his boozy blood.
They crisscross over gravestones
on their way to rusted drums
I wouldn't want to know the prior
contents of. But that's not it.
Those maple roots go deep.
Earl's tapping graves,
recycling relatives and friends.

I came upon him gathering. It led
to half a row, because I said
with DNA it's possible to tell
who's in his syrup, jug for jug,
then knew I shouldn't have,
with Eddie only last October,
maples bare, his widow's raincoat
open, flapping, everybody soaked.
Besides, it's what they're meant
to do, some older than our oldest dead,
draw up another spring, the sap
a sweet concurrence
flowing through the bright blue lines.

— Peter Stillman

Peter Stillman has written about his hamlet in the Northern Catskills in rural Schoharie County, N.Y., in both poetry and prose. His two collections are Gilead, *published by the N.Y. State Council on the Arts, and* Planting by the Moon, *published by Heinemann. Other poems have appeared in* California Quarterly, Blue Line, Mississippi Review, Zone 3, Alca, *and* College English, *and in the books* Important Words, Angles of Vision, *and* Literacy for Democracy.

"A Man's Shagbark Sound"

The Poetry of James Still

by James Owens

From the Mountain, From the Valley
New and Collected Poems
by James Still
edited by Ted Olson
The University Press of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky. - 2001
$24.00 (hardcover)

This was a man's song, a ballad of ridge and hound,
Of love and loss. The words blossomed in his throat.
This was a man's singing alone behind the plow
With a bird's excellence, a man's shagbark sound.
—James Still, "A Man Singing to Himself"

James Still's first published poem appeared in 1931. "Dreams" is not a very good poem, and it gives little indication of what his mature work will be like:

Daring to dream of what cannot be,
I have plucked my roots from earthly ways
For a cloisonné vase of unreality,
And a cup of water for my share of days.

There is a little more, but nothing would distinguish this poem of Still's from anyone else's. What precocious, literary-minded young person has never written something similar: a rejection of the world in favor of a high-minded artistic life?

Nevertheless, read in the light of Still's biography, "Dreams" does seem prescient. Only a year later, Still would move to the rural mountain community of Knott County in Eastern Kentucky, where he would spend much of his remaining 70 years living in a log house on the bank of Wolfpen Creek and recording the daily life of a vanishing Appalachian culture in fiction, poems, and notebooks. If "earthly ways" for a writer means the calculated pursuit of fame, money, and critical notice, then James Still certainly did pluck his roots away.

On the other hand, Still's work demonstrates an intense interest in the people around him. His retreat was never a withdrawal, and his poems and stories breathe with the texture and heft of life as it was lived. The poems in *From the Mountain, From the Valley: New and Collected Poems* are anything but daintily cut flowers in a "cloisonné vase of unreality."

The value of "Dreams" is in the contrast it provides, coming first in the collected poems. We turn the page and at once hear the poet's authentic voice, the voice we will keep hearing—and will welcome—throughout the rest of the book: intelligent, thoughtful, quizzical at times, often ironic, embodied in meticulously crafted and observed poems. *From the Mountain, From the Valley* makes it clear that we have been wrong to consider Still as primarily a writer of fiction, though the fiction is certainly important.

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services interim director Ted Olson, who has ably edited *From the Mountain, From the Valley,* writes in the preface that "collecting all of Still's mature poetry within a single, chronologically arranged volume should elucidate an over-arching irony in his career: that Still's literary voice—nowadays associated primarily with his fiction—evolved through the writing of poetry." Earlier in the preface, Olson maintains that Still's "poetry, while a generally overlooked component of his oeuvre, is arguably the foundation for all his work in other literary genres."

This book, which also contains an illuminating autobiographical essay by Still and a useful bibliography of the poems, should silence any lingering doubts. Still the novelist was also a poet who, from now on, must be recognized as indispensable to anyone interested in Appalachian literature—and to anyone who genuinely cares about poetry.

In the late 1930s, Still seemed poised to become a major figure in American literature. His poems were regularly appearing in national publications, including three in the October 1935 issue of *Poetry,* the magazine that had been instrumental in launching the careers of many major poets of the 20th century, among them T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. When Still's novel tracing the Depression-era trials of a fictional Kentucky family, *River of Earth,* was published five years later, it became a national bestseller and won praise from important critics. Stories and poems followed in venues such as the *Atlantic, The Nation,* and *The New York Times,* but Still's rise to status as "major writer" seemed to stall after the early successes.

Still retained enough of the "up-and-coming" cachet to carry him through the 1940s, including several fellowships at the

prestigious Yaddo colony in New York, where he found himself in the company of writers such as novelist Katherine Anne Porter and poet Elizabeth Bishop. But after that, there wasn't much else the outside world would take note of, no more coups on the national scene. For the next few decades, Still spent most of his time at home in Knott County, writing slowly and carefully, sometimes no more than a short story a year, a poem every three or four years. His work was still finding its place in good magazines, but nobody seemed to notice much.

Why were there no more bestsellers? Why was it almost 50 years before *The Wolfpen Poems* of 1986 followed Still's first poetry collection, *Hounds on the Mountain,* which had appeared back in 1937? Whatever happened to James Still?

I suspect that this is the wrong question. Judging from his work — which isn't much different during the period before, during, and after his apparent rise, stall, and descent in the forum of literary estimation — the change, if there was one, didn't come from Still so much as from his cultural environment.

The 1930s had been a good time for regional writers, especially Southern regional writers, who were buoyed by the successes of William Faulkner and of Fugitive poets, such as John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren. Still's work happened to coincide with the vogue for regionalism — for a while at least. When the vogue shifted, as fashions eventually do, Still apparently never thought to shift along with it but kept on producing his own distinctive body of work, at his own pace and in his own way.

Most of Still's explicit statements about his writing, in interviews and in his essay appended to the collected poems, are heavy with the sense that he is writing about a way of life soon to disappear, or in fact already gone, from Appalachia and the world, even from the relative seclusion of Eastern Kentucky. Another early poem gives some indication as to what Still was up to. "Artifacts," apparently unpublished before the collected poems, was probably written in 1935 or before. Here, an unnamed speaker, possibly the last of his kind, stands on a hillside after some unspecified, but obviously monumental, disaster and speaks words "heavy/With old hatred" and "loud with defeat." The reader senses that a culture, a world, is coming to an end.

> "We are undone. The mountains crumble
> Beneath our feet. Our wave of earth subsides.
> A little time and man shall stride no more,
> His thighs having wasted with little using.
> We are the bones for distant questioning."
>
> This was his parable, and it was spoken
> Upon a mountainside.

An important impulse behind Still's work, in all genres, is archaeological, "the bones for distant questioning." His interest in literal archaeology was real. Late in life, after a teaching job at the University of Kentucky furnished money for travel, he spent 14 summers in Central America, visiting Mayan ruins. At home, he practiced his own sort of archaeology in the present tense, recording everyday events and scraps of his neighbors' conversation in stacks of notebooks that accumulated over the decades. A selection from these was published by the University Press of Kentucky in 1991 as *The Wolfpen Notebooks.* In the book's introduction, Laura Lee, one of the students who helped winnow material for inclusion from the many hundreds of pages Still had filled, quotes him on his motive for collecting and publishing the sayings: "Most of the participants are dead. Save for their gravestones, this is the only record for some that they lived and laughed and wept and had opinions like the rest of us. I have long tried to speak for them."

Poems almost inevitably communicate something of what a poet thinks about poetry, how one should write it, and what sort of subjects are worth writing about. Still takes a straightforward approach to the *ars poetica* in "A Hillsman Speaks."

> Poets should write about people with breath in their bodies,
> And about things men work for and find some use, —
> Say, a big greasy dish of ham and eggs,
> A shoat with a dozen suckling pigs, foals mulling at the teats,
> And men scratching a living out of these hills.
> Or, if a poem needs beauty,
> What would beat a team of mules with a new harness
> Showing a bit of brass, and a brand new green wagon?

It all turns out to be a bit tongue-in-cheek, as the "hillsman" goes on to accuse poets of being "homebodies, house-cats with inky fingers" and to suggest that "if a man feels a poem coming on," he might do well to quell the urge to write by doing some honest work with an ax, rather than with a pen. But the satire is gentle. Still's poems really are about "people with breath in their bodies," and they always value the type of concrete subjects the hillsman advocates more than any abstractions.

"Wolfpen Creek" is another, subtler version of Still's literary theory. Here, the poet's job is to remember and record, to per-

Hindman Settlement School Archives

James Still speaks at the Hindman Settlement School in July 1986.

petuate the knowledge of what it is like to be alive in a particular time and locale: "How it was in that place, how light hung in a bright pool/Of air like water, in an eddy of cloud and sky,/I will long remember."

Still is an archaeologist of affect, a conservationist of what it was to be alive in specific circumstances. But recording and preserving a culture, however valuable in themselves, are not poetry, and Still was a poet. Even if it was James Still the archaeologist who offered the rare after-the-fact explanations for his poems, James Still the artist was never far away when they were written. "Morning: Dead Mare Branch" is a typical Still poem, and it provides some insight into how the artist worked.

Our mouths are fresh with morning on the hills,
And sleep-washed bodies wake with quickened thought
To sounds of day, to a new strain of words
Rising within our throats like soaring birds.
The winds are up, the coves blow green and cool
With woolly leaves, and catkins thresh the air
Now loud with rusty cries of crows in flight;
The day has come, the sun's hot-eyed stare
Has quieted the sleepless wanderers of the night.

Light in our hands the ax splits the oak,
The plow blades glide unerring through the earth
And all the fields awake, and all our world is free.
Here is a day ridge-broken and apart,
This is a morning bright upon the heart.

This poem is a variant on the classic sonnet, a form Still returns to in about half of his poems, as if he has recognized the proper range for his breath. It records a favorite occasion for Still's work, awaking renewed as morning comes over the hills.

Renewal happens on two intimately related levels: in the natural realm, where "the coves blow green and cool," catkins are growing on the trees, crows take flight, and the sun chases away darkness and its predators; and in the human world, where the human race and human culture are renewed through interaction with the natural, as "sleep-washed bodies" lead to "a new strain of words." The fact that hands split the oak while plow blades cut straight furrows seems essential to the realization that "all our world is free." And Still is not talking about just any world. He seems to have the freedom of mountain life specifically in mind, an independence conferred by isolation: "Here is a day ridge-broken and apart."

The content is simple enough, but content in poetry only matters because of form. Still is a craftsman, ever in control, and "Morning: Dead Mare Branch" is luminous with a musical intelligence that lights every line the way dawn lights the sky. Notice the difference in weight between the halves of "The plow blades glide unerring through the earth." The effort of horse and plowman comes through in the slow and bunched stressed syllables of "plow blades glide," an effort emphasized in the unobtrusive alliteration on the internal l sounds, to be followed by the relatively light and swift "unerring through the earth," recalling the ease of gliding down the furrow after the strain of starting the plow.

The sonic pulse of the poem unifies its content, polishes and elevates mere observation until it becomes insight. The poem plays its music overall in a dance of r sounds — *word* and *birds,* for example — and long i sounds, such as *flight* and *night.* This chain of rhyme-words provides a neat synopsis of the poem's theme, as sound and sense converge perfectly. *Rising* in the line, "Rising within our throats like soaring birds," not only emphasizes the ascent of the "new strain of words" by shifting the stress to the beginning of the line, but the word does so by combining these two dominant r and long i sounds. Those sounds then separate and revolve around each other through the rest of the poem, through phrasing such as "catkins thresh the air/Now loud with rusty cries of crows in flight," until the r and long i sounds are reunited in the word *bright* in the final line: "This is a morning bright upon the heart."

This *is* what dawn is like in Appalachia. This *is* the way "light [hangs] in a bright pool/Of air like water." What "Morning: Dead Mare Branch" preserves, though, is less tangible, but more valuable, than the examples of worthy objects offered in the *ars poetica* of "A Hillsman Speaks." This poem tells us less about what dawn looks like in Appalachia than about what it feels like to wake refreshed again in that complicated web of natural and human relations. One great pleasure of reading Still's poems is in recognizing that he has preserved and recreated an important piece of our own experience of life in the world and that we can return to his work over and over again and it will be morning there again, every time.

James Owens lives in Northport, Ala., and is the editor of The Sow's Ear Poetry Review. *His poems have appeared in recent issues of* Wind *and* Nantahala.

Patton's Soldier

He moves, these days, in a dream
Of riddled limbs that once rained down
On his men and him at the shelling
Of Saarlautern Roads.
Or, worse, he sees
The haunting, withered gazes of those
Gaunt old 3-C boys who sheltered with him
Under bare trees in the starving 30s.

These days, when he patrols his lawn,
Dry leaves fall like bronze stars
On the flood of the evening sun.

—Stephen M. Holt

Stephen Holt teaches at Ohio University Southern in Ironton. The Jesse Stuart Foundation published his book of poems and essays, Late Mowing, *in 2000. In 2002, he won the Appalachian Writers Association's James Still Award for Poetry. Holt's father was a master sergeant in Patton's 3rd Army and a recipient of the bronze star for valor. He and the men from his communications unit strung telephone cable while under fire in battle zones during World War II.*

Reviews

Sodom Laurel Album
by Rob Amberg
University of North Carolina Press
Chapel Hill, N.C. - 2002
$45.00 (hardcover with a CD)

Rob Amberg's pictures pack surprises. In one, an old woman pours milk. It takes a moment to notice the gray floor where a cat sits, mouth open, expression eager. Beyond that, darker still, a man leans by the doorway, looking out.

Seeing that photo in *Sodom Laurel Album* — a visual, oral, and aural portrait of a tiny mountain community — was like running into an old friend. When I was editor of *Now & Then,* I often called photographer Rob Amberg, and many pictures we used are in this volume: of work in the tobacco fields, of music-making and milking, of cooking and the KKK.

Besides appreciating Amberg's visual knowledge of a rural way of life, I once again admired his complicated compositions, the tonal range, the evidence of movement, the way the subjects look right at the camera, revealing their character.

Then a visitor jarred my perceptions. He glanced through my review copy of *Sodom Laurel* and said it looked like a cliché. After that remark, I simply thumbed through, glancing at the photos instead of studying them. There's a weather-beaten woman in old clothes in a weather-beaten doorway. There's a man in overalls plowing a field behind a horse. People hang out on porches, sometimes with a banjo or guitar. Two fellows hold shotguns while giving the camera an unfriendly look. There are trailers, unpainted tobacco barns, even a wringer-washer on the porch. Yep. It's the rural Appalachian poor — self-sufficient, musical, and not-too-tidy.

Rob Amberg came to the mountains of Western North Carolina in the early 1970s and sought out someone who still lived an old-fashioned life. He found 76-year-old Dellie Norton in the community informally known as Sodom Laurel. She opened her home to Amberg — and also to folklorists and musicologists who came along. She and her extended family have been featured in other books, films, and recordings (among them, *Come Go Home with Me* by Sheila Kay Adams, a book published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1995). Now Amberg has added to the collection with this book of photos, oral histories, his own memories, and a CD of songs.

In the oral histories, Dellie Norton and her relatives describe their family (who moved to the mountains in a covered wagon), farm work, the cabins where they lived, food storage, cooking, tobacco-growing, and the sad story of Junior, an abandoned relative Norton raised and who still lived with her. The language is as picturesque and packed with information as the photos. Norton remembers renting an acre and growing a crop of tobacco by herself at age 18: "I cut the baccer and hoed it and set it out. I cut it and hauled it in with a horse and hung it myself. I think I got a hundred something dollars. … I went and bought me some nice dresses …"

The CD is filled with ballads and songs such as "Black is the Color," "Shady Grove," and "Pretty Peggy-O." Mostly sung a cappella, the quavering voices and the subject matter (lots of death) are spine-tingling and beautiful, especially Doug Wallin's strong, rich voice. The appendix with a short, confusing essay by folklorist Allen Tullos, who collected some of the songs, assumes the reader knows all about the history of mountain music. Context would have been nice, but the songs stand up on their own.

It is the photos that tell the story best. Amberg chose subjects whose lives sometimes looked and sounded Southern Gothic, which can lead to cruel generalizations. But if we want to record the lives of the most rural mountain people, we want someone like Amberg to do it. Unlike many photographers who shoot poor people, his notes on the photos, though placed inconveniently in an appendix, tell names and circumstances. Both the beautifully reproduced photos and the stories convey a warm and ongoing relationship.

And it's clear from this book that we do want the record, for timeless as these people's lives look, the photographs and stories represent a specific time and place. Dellie Norton and her community lived in the past, but they were yanked

Rob Amberg

Dellie Norton pours milk for an eagerly awaiting friend.

along — willingly — at the end of a long kite tail into the present.

Dellie Norton "still raised a big garden, milked a cow, grew tobacco, and hunted ginseng," Amberg writes, "but she also loved her telephone and TV. … While Dellie remembered a time when she had been more self-sufficient, she seemed to like the changes in her life." When she died in 1993, she had already moved from her primitive mountain farm to a house more convenient to the road and equipped with a bathroom and an electric stove.

The pictures and stories illustrate that subtle, inevitable progression. Amberg has made a good record.

— Pat Arnow

Sodom Laurel *is the companion book to a national traveling exhibition; the exhibit is at the Asheville Art Museum in Asheville, N.C., from October 18, 2002, to January 19, 2003.*

Pat Arnow, a former editor of Now & Then *and* Southern Exposure, *now lives and writes in New York City.*

No Heroes: A Memoir of Coming Home

by Chris Offutt

Simon & Schuster
New York - 2002
$24.00 (hardcover)

In Lexington, Ky., the critical reaction to Chris Offutt's latest effort, *No Heroes: A Memoir of Coming Home,* was fierce enough to start a literary feud.

In the memoir, Offutt details the year he spent in his native Rowan County, Ky. He had returned to the state, intending to spend the rest of his life there with his family. It was his hope that he could permanently cure the bouts of homesickness that had afflicted him in the 20 years he had lived elsewhere while pointing out the social ills afflicting the region and bringing about change. Interwoven among chapters of Offutt's own experience are the concentration camp survival stories told to Offut by his parents-in-law, Arthur and Irene. The unlikely pairing of the two stories is intriguing, begging the question early on: How are those stories related?

The chapters of the memoir dedicated to the story of Offutt's return to Rowan County detail his hiring as an English instructor at his alma mater, Morehead State University. They also describe how he reconnected with friends and family in the region and established his own family as residents of Eastern Kentucky. Offutt's stories and impressions have angered many Kentuckians for the stereotypical way he portrays the educational system in Morehead as well as the locals and the culture.

Last April when the book was released, *Lexington Herald-Leader* book editor Cheryl Truman was angered enough by Offutt's latest work to write back-to-back *Herald-Leader* articles — an April 13 column, followed the next day by a review with the headline "Memoir Raises Condescension to an Art Form." Kentucky, laments Truman, "is used to having a sophisticated media elite write how pitiful we are … what we are not used to is having Kentucky portrayed this way by a Kentuckian."

A reader would assume Offutt wrote the truth of his own experience during his year in Morehead, Ky. However, for Kentuckians, the narrator in *No Heroes* quickly becomes difficult to trust, as there are details in the memoir that are recognizably wrong. For example, in the first chapter, "Job Interview," he writes of Morehead State University, "I finagled an interview for a teaching position at the only four-year university in the hills." Of course, Eastern Kentucky University is a quick trip down the interstate, and there are other four-year colleges in Appalachian Kentucky: for example, Alice Lloyd College and Kentucky Christian College.

Offutt also spends a chapter describing an exchange between himself and a student. He tells her she should buy a dictionary in the school bookstore, and she responds, "The bookstore is nothing but T-shirts and magazines." While Offutt doesn't actually say that he couldn't find a dictionary within the town limits, the implication is there. In fact, Truman spent a good 200 words in her article listing what types of dictionaries can be found in the Morehead State University bookstore.

It is these distortions combined with the stereotypes used as banter that raised the ire of many local and regional readers and critics. In the chapter "Harley in a Car," for instance, Offutt describes his boyhood friend's new girlfriend, whose last name in Caudill. "This last name was as common in the hills as tree leaves, and Harley took pains to identify her," Offutt writes. "Such distinctions are crucial in Rowan County, where [people] … shoot friends and neighbors over these issues."

Some of his writing is poignant, with his familiarity with the region reflected in his word choice. In other parts, however, Offutt's sentimentality and use of stereotypes for humor weaken these strengths.

These failings also obscure the stories of Offutt's mother-in-law, Irene, and father-in-law, Arthur. Their stories are told in the first person and are differentiated from Offutt's own story with chapter titles such as "Arthur Goes to War" and "Irene Finds Freedom." These chapters recount their memories of the beginning of World War II, of being transported to concentration camps, and the times they almost died. At one point during her imprisonment at Plaszow in Poland, Irene used beets to color her cheeks and lips to appear healthy so the Nazis wouldn't kill her with the other sick prisoners.

Their survival of mental and physical torture is told sparingly and with raw beauty. Irene hides a small child in her quarters to prevent his death, a Nazi officer blinds Arthur by lashing him with a six-foot whip, Arthur proves himself useful to his guards and torturers as a handyman — they are acts others would consider heroic, but Arthur and Irene felt they acted out of necessity to hold onto their lives and also their humanity.

Offutt also documents conversations he has with Arthur as he is writing the book. In the chapter, "Everything Is Simple," the conversation brings *No Heroes'* two story lines together. Arthur tells Offutt that he is afraid people will say that he is a liar and that he fabricated his experience during the Holocaust. "When the victims write about their experience, there is a tendency to make themselves sound better than they were. Remember," Arthur instructs, "no heroes." If readers applied Arthur's observation to the entire memoir, they could say that when Offutt writes about himself, there is the ten-

dency to make himself sound better than he was.

After the reader finishes the epilogue and closes the book, it is difficult to forget the stereotypical portrayal of Eastern Kentuckians. It is these stereotypes that linger, rather than Offutt's account of his journey home and how he learned, through his own failure to single-handedly change life in Morehead, the truth of his father-in-law's observation: There really are "no heroes."

—Beth Newberry

Beth Newberry is a writer and native Kentuckian. She recently moved to Lexington, Ky., from Washington, D.C. Her articles and reviews have appeared in Sojourners *magazine.*

Raising the Dead
by Ron Rash

Iris Press
Oak Ridge, Tenn. - 2002
$12.00 (paperback)

Most of us experience a sense of loss when we journey back to our childhood home, for it is never quite the same—smaller than we remembered, often rundown, hollow. And if you discover that the house is gone, replaced by a VFW post with an expansive gravel parking lot, you might try to describe to others the space the house once filled: its dark green porch, the second floor window that opened into the heart of a mimosa tree, and a fenced backyard where you learned to walk on stilts. And if you search hard enough, some vestiges of the house might remain: steps leading up from the sidewalk, a stone retaining wall you conquered like an umbrellaless trapeze artist.

Imagine now that your journey can never begin, that the town has vanished, the valley flooded under tons of water. Only this time, the imagined is true. This is the Jocassee Valley that Ron Rash has preserved in his new collection, *Raising the Dead.* When the Duke Power Company built a dam in the 1970s to create the Jocassee Reservoir in the South Carolina mountains, the valley was washed clean of the living and the dead. In Cherokee, Jocassee means "place of the lost," and, unfortunately, its very name became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Raising the Dead is a quiet lament for what was lost and what was left behind. In an effective, plaintive style, Rash saves what he can of the land, a people, and their memories.

"A Homestead on the Horsepasture" captures the resolute spirit of a man who "stayed to watch/water tug his farm under/one row at a time." This is a man who would rather take things into his own hands:

> When little else showed but what
> his own hands had raised he soaked
> house and barn with kerosene,
> shattered a lantern, and as
> it burned, the taste of ashes
> filled his mouth ...

Another haunting image surfaces in "Bottomland" as the water rises in the cornfields, revealing scarecrows that "stayed like totems," their "raised arms spread/like arms of the forsaken." When the lake is completely formed, Rash takes us on a surreal boat ride in "Under Jocassee," pointing out landmarks buried underwater: Horsepasture River, a road, a family graveyard, a house, a barn, "a woman/singing only to herself" until "something dark has come/over her although/no cloud shades the sun." And "Whippoorwill" has a mythic quality when the bird, "death's composer," will not stop singing after farmer Silas Broughton died. Men seek to destroy it but return at daybreak exhausted, "and not one/would say what was seen or heard,/or why each wore a feather/pressed to the pulse of his wrist."

In tidy one-stanza poems that often consist of one long sentence, Rash pays a narrative tribute to this Appalachian community. He honors their tenacity in "Last Service," in which the church literally becomes an island accessible only by boat. The congregation lit candles and "sang/from memory deep as water/old hymns of resurrection," even "though cranes and bulldozers came,/yanked free marble and creek stones/like loose teeth."

Rash tells a dramatic tale of the lost in "Watauga County: 1803," when the river rose so fast, there was "no time to lantern children/up to loft or higher ground," and the current took the house away. Only a howling hound was left alive but had to be shot "so men might/drag out those drowned in the harsh/covenant of that failed ark." The cadence and simple beauty of Rash's free verse and the Biblical allusion make us relive that watery nightmare.

Poems of the Civil War linger in "Antietam" and in the dramatic monologue, "Shelton Laurel," which harkens back to atrocities that make the speaker wish he were a trout in a deep cavern "whose eyes are blind from years of too much dark./I envy them for all they haven't seen." Another poem, "Speckled Trout," remembers happier times when a boy and his cousin find secret fishing holes: "those hidden places./I loved/how we found them, the way we/followed no trail, just stream-sound/tangled in rhododendron."

Rash's narrative strength often catches us off guard, as in "Madison County: 1934." A seemingly innocuous poem about stolen chicken eggs comes to a powerful close when the reader discovers that the thief is not a chicken snake but a child who has taken the bait: a hook in an egg. She is found "hunched in a corner, her cheek/opened like a mouth, the barb/unrelenting as hunger." Rash is not only able to tell a poetic story, but he is also able to rivet the reader with this graphic element of surprise.

"Barbed Wire" is among the best poems in the collection: an elegy for what's left behind. Rash catches my fancy with the poem's bright staccato energy:

> New strung, it sparks a live wire
> when sun hits right, and can be
> thumbed like guitar string, its tune
> pure country twang...

But the narrator finds only "a coil of old strands" that grabs at the calf of his leg. He searches for any sign of a homeplace but finds nothing, so he imagines a farmer stringing wire post to post and ends the poem masterfully:

> one man's tenuous hold on
> the earth snagged like a memory
> surfaced long after, time-dulled,
> still able to draw blood.

Rash's collection lets us experience the history of the people who were uprooted, lost. His exacting words are fresh and

imaginative, and the reader feels like a time-traveler to the past. A few of the poems are sleepy and repetitive — the simile of "loose teeth" was used in two poems — but most are striking and memorable. The poem "In Dismal Gorge," though, serves as fair warning: "Too much too soon disappears,/lives slip away like water./We fill our Bibles with names./The lost can stay lost down here."

— Laura Treacy Bentley

Laura Treacy Bentley is a poet and occasional literary critic from West Virginia. Her work has appeared in Poetry Ireland Review, The Stinging Fly *(Ireland),* Antietam Review, Art Times, Night Sun, Now & Then, *and* Controlled Burn, *among others, and in numerous anthologies. She won a Fellowship Award for Literature from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts in 1994. Her first collection of poetry,* The Untangling, *will be published in Ireland by Salmon Publishing next year.*

The Gods of Little Pleasures

By Bill Brown

Sow's Ear Press
Abingdon, Va. - 2001
$14.00 (paper)

In a recent issue of *American Poet,* Linda Gregg says, "There are two elements to finding a poem: discovering the subject matter and locating the concrete details and images of which the poems are built." She goes on to say, "The best poets have a gift for finding such details."

Tennessee poet Bill Brown fits this description nicely. Like his three previous books of poetry, *The Gods of Little Pleasures* illuminates detail after detail of a poet's life. His previous book, *The Art of Dying,* dealt with his mother's death and contained reflections that mourn and celebrate her. The current book finds the poet in a comfortable, or at least a peaceful, middle age, able to look for and celebrate the small particulars of life.

The book is divided into three untitled sections. The first section recalls images and details from childhood and family history. Brown looks back at his parents: their lives, dreams, and their ends. In "Bath," the poet and his wife bathe his frail mother. "She is a tiny sculpture of herself:/her face staunch against/not knowing who she is,/her eyes, brown clouded blurs." The child and parent have reversed roles.

"Poem for My Brother" is an ode to the strength and resilience of the human spirit. "Short circuits in your brain/tangles arms and legs in a dance/until your own shaking/knocked you to the floor." Brown catalogs the triumphs and successes of the epileptic who "felt at home in the wilderness/of mountains, rivers, and swamps, landscapes that celebrate/the brutal and beautiful/dealings of God."

The section ends with "Poetry Lesson." A student's negative reaction to Robert Frost's "After Apple Picking" opens a dialogue with his teacher. Parallel details of the apple picker of Frost's poem and the life of Brown's mechanic emerge. The mechanic who "worked himself to death,/how some nights/he mumbled *carburetor* and *spark plug* in his sleep,/how before my father died, he had forgotten his dreams." All these lives are built on and illuminated by details. Tangibles give shape to the intangible. These poems tell us that the poet's generation has become the caretakers of parents, children, and the extended family.

The second section opens with "Leaven." Dedicated to the poet's grandmother, the word *leaven* is used in the context of "element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven or modify a whole." Each poem is a small shrine to the influence of tradition upon subsequent generations. "GrandSally's words became the leaven/that lifted our meager lives across the seasons/and when she died, my sister left to tell the bees." In "Among the Oaks," the poet speaks of three generations of women — wife, grandmother, and mother — all at 40. Their pleasures and cares cross the years and generations to connect them.

New generations venerating the old by honoring tradition is a recurring theme. "From the Waitress at the Smithville Diner" come dire warnings about turning from our parents' ways: "Them uptown preachers carry the lord/on their lips and them little girls/in the trailer court carry baby Jesus/on their hips. Churches gettin ready/for the rapture and Jesus is growing up/in dollar store ideas, watchin God on tv." Brown clearly respects the practices and traditions of past generations. "Leaven," "My Grandmother's Language," and "Driving Home" all speak of folkways ranging from speech patterns to snake lore.

"Flashed" describes the poet's grandfather flashing the tops of fence posts with galvanized steel to weatherproof them. Years later, the poet leaves the interstate to drive by the homeplace: "Fence posts flashed by/my grandfather still stand,/rotting from the ground up,/but the metal, a mottled pewter,/still mirrors the sun." The section closes with "What My Grandmother Expected," a poem that tells of using a treasured afghan made by his grandmother to cover the victim of a highway accident. "I pictured how I would explain to my wife/the afghan's disappearance, how we prized/that intricate piece of fabric, how I was/still doing what my grandmother taught me." The poet realizes that we are of the flesh of our ancestors and are what they taught us to be. What we find quaint in youth is the flashing on the fence post, sustaining us.

The third section speaks of contemporary life, an examination of life in the middle years. The poetic voice looks at the business of life with the peace and understanding that come with maturity and experience. The poems are of small moments, little pleasures: an autumn with the cat, catching the green of his wife's eyes in the early spring greenery, the howl of a wolf mingling with the rush of the river in the Idaho wilderness, books that litter the study floor. In "Morning Chant Near the End of the Millennium," he recalls that

> This morning on the way to work,
> I turn off the experts setting us up
> for the possibility of ground troops
> and watch our little sun, hugging
> the ridge above the pond, bloom
> red-gold against the silent landscape.
> Cows stand solemn in their shadows,
> and geese sway heads like clumsy
> metronomes as they waddle toward water.
> I wonder what, if anything, has singled
> me out for this moment, this peace.

Written during the peace-keeping efforts in the Balkans, the poem seems

even more appropriate after the events of September 11.

"Word," the last poem in the book, gives us the title. Brown depicts everyday life, the little pleasures that make life familiar and comfortable, and the wisdom to enjoy them: morning coffee, Sunday papers, old wine, old tractors, billowing sheets, stirring soup, kneading bread, and building fires. "I kindle the first fall fire/ to all the gods of necessity/who keep us fed and warm,/and to the gods of little pleasures/who help us to be kind."

The details are leaven, enlivening these characters and these poems. *The Gods of Little Pleasures* is a fine collection of meditations upon big questions, but it fills those meditations with the small details and still moments that give us hope.

—A. Jane Hicks

Jane Hicks is a frequent contributor to Now & Then. *She is a teacher, poet, and fiber artist from East Tennessee.*

In Brief

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—Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington is reviews editor for Now & Then *magazine.*

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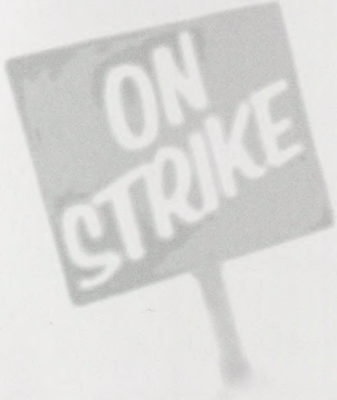
drift mouth, miner man, roof bolt,
rock fall, grievance. There was nothing
we couldn't talk about.

We birthed our babies, and suckled
the sturdy things who never knew a stranger,
who got babysat or slept through and learned,
as they grew, to be dumb about meetings
and our friends. We hid them
from danger when we could, we spanked,
we merged them, we erred & joyed.

We were the red girls. The men's
lashes blackened from coal,
our hands blacked from newsprint,
the leak of spray paint—
right to strike, to hell with racist fools
& their capitalist masters, we won't work that day,
but we were red girls, and all the world
could redden too, a plan
we checkered into our hearts.



hoot owl, before the day's forced quiet.
We cooed love-making, we laughed. We cried
and we were young and just learning.

Fiat, Chrysler, Pinto, Vega—
we were car girls. We skirted floods
and cranked through fog. We radio sang,
we milk sang, we revolution sang,
we every day sang, we mountain sang,
we cigarette sang, we low gas gauge sang.

We were Mother Jones girls, fossil girls,
theory girls, change our minds,
can't slow down girls, fearless girls,
brave though scared, face thugs and guns
and cops and jail girls, party girls, ex girls,
quilt and write, teach and work girls,
depression, divorce, stay married girls,
passion girls, grieving girls, still talking girls.

—Page Dougherty

Page Dougherty lives in New York City. This poem arises from her years in Boone County, W.Va., where she was an activist among coal miners. Dougherty's full-length collection, No One With a Past Is Safe, *was published in January 2002 by Word Press. Her poems have been published in* Prairie Schooner, Agni, American Voice, Denver Quarterly, *and* Antioch Review.

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— Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington is reviews editor for Now & Then *magazine.*

Coal Girls

In Memory of Melinda Brown and Gina Brandt Fall

We were paper girls.
We cut, typed, pasted,
we scrapped over the line, we cooked,
we camped out, we rubbed headlines
letter by letter seated on
the blue-to-be-invisible line.
We sold the paper on mine roads.

We didn't work in the mines, we didn't *work*—
until the strikes and broken cars
or single life made some of us low-wage girls.

We adopted mountain-lilt—
redeye gravy, a poke, I liked
to die, let's go up. Coal filled our mouths,
drift mouth, miner man, roof bolt,
rock fall, grievance. There was nothing
we couldn't talk about.

We birthed our babies, and suckled
the sturdy things who never knew a stranger,
who got babysat or slept through and learned,
as they grew, to be dumb about meetings
and our friends. We hid them
from danger when we could, we spanked,
we merged them, we erred & joyed.

We were the red girls. The men's
lashes blackened from coal,
our hands blacked from newsprint,
the leak of spray paint—
right to strike, to hell with racist fools
& their capitalist masters, we won't work that day,
but we were red girls, and all the world
could redden too, a plan
we checkered into our hearts.

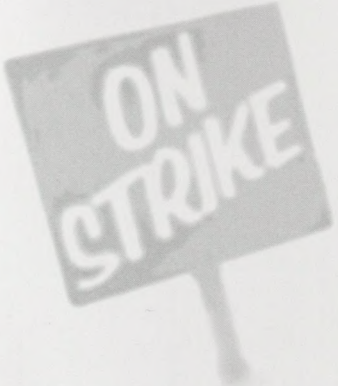
We were sex girls. At night we screwed,
or in cars. Or, when our husbands worked
hoot owl, before the day's forced quiet.
We cooed love-making, we laughed. We cried
and we were young and just learning.

Fiat, Chrysler, Pinto, Vega—
we were car girls. We skirted floods
and cranked through fog. We radio sang,
we milk sang, we revolution sang,
we every day sang, we mountain sang,
we cigarette sang, we low gas gauge sang.

We were Mother Jones girls, fossil girls,
theory girls, change our minds,
can't slow down girls, fearless girls,
brave though scared, face thugs and guns
and cops and jail girls, party girls, ex girls,
quilt and write, teach and work girls,
depression, divorce, stay married girls,
passion girls, grieving girls, still talking girls.

—Page Dougherty

Page Dougherty lives in New York City. This poem arises from her years in Boone County, W.Va., where she was an activist among coal miners. Dougherty's full-length collection, No One With a Past Is Safe, *was published in January 2002 by Word Press. Her poems have been published in* Prairie Schooner, Agni, American Voice, Denver Quarterly, *and* Antioch Review.



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Herbert McFeely

Ruth Robertson Sims, Jim Minick's aunt, Central Pennsylvania, 1940. She died of cancer in 2001 after living a full life despite her neurofibromatosis, the "elephant man's disease." Minick completed a chapbook in tribute to this not-so-famous Appalachian. He teaches English at Radford University in Virginia.

The Bike

A rich relative promised her this
a one-speed English touring bike
with narrow tires, wide seat,
curving frame for gentle ladies,
a reward for twelve-year-old Ruth.
If she went to Johns Hopkins,
Mrs. Flickinger would pay
for both surgery and bike.

Ruth traveled to Baltimore,
five hours away, lost
a day to dream of a prettier
mirror while doctors cut at
the flap of skin that covered
her right eye. The scalpel
did not work, gave Ruth
a scar on an already homely face.

Still, in the black-and-white from 1940,
Ruth straddles the bike and looks
into the camera, her hair curled,
her good eye piercing the shadows.
The barn and mountain behind her,
she sits, gripping handlebars,
one foot on the pedal,
the other touching the ground,
ready to push off.

—Jim Minick

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